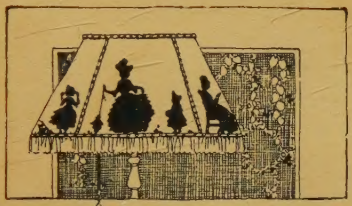
ROMAN SUMMER

By

LUDWIG LEWISOHN



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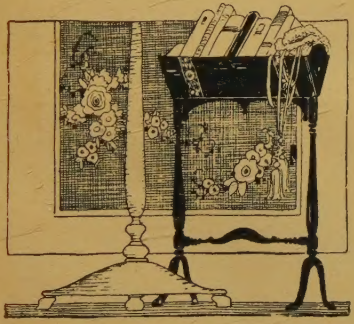

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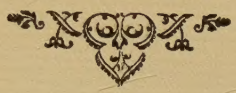

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Roman Summer

Roman Summer

By

LUDWIG LEWISOHN

New York and London
HARPER & BROTHERS
1927

ROMAN SUMMER

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PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

FIRST EDITION

G–B

To Thelma

Forum Romanum! You remember
The hour we said good-by
To the dark poppies and the marble,
And once more you and I
Turned to the tragic arch of Titus
And saw the triumph thrust
Candle and shew-bread of our Temple
In alien glare and dust?
Shyly at sunset rose between us
A story on that day
Which, like my hope and heart and being,
In your dear hands I lay.

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Part One

ROMAN SUMMER

I

JOHN AUSTIN, a young American of slow resolves, found himself, at the age of thirty-two, at the end of his rope. To his few friends he seemed contented and at ease, an impression which bore witness to the aloofness in which his true life was spent. Since he had left college, ten years before, he had served on one after another of the newspapers of his native city, remaining finally and longest on the staff of the Columbus *Sentinel*. He had begun with the usual miscellaneous assignments of a reporter on a provincial paper, but had gradually, with the consent of his superiors, drifted into the reviewing of books and plays and lectures and moving pictures. He was considered reliable but not brilliant—a good, quiet, clean chap, and only Hooker, titular literary editor of the paper but actually in charge of the Sunday edition, knew that John Austin was the author of the inconspicuous but elegant bits of familiar verse

which, at long intervals, appeared in upper or lower corners of the paper.

These verses confirmed Hooker's faith in his subordinate. Through thick glasses, set obliquely on his insignificant nose, he would survey the lank gray-clad figure of Austin, the rather grave, thin face, the bluish eyes with their steady glance. He would utter a sound of approval that wavered between groan and grunt.

"You've got a distinct gift, my boy, a distinct gift. And you don't make mincemeat of the king's English, as seems to be the fashion nowadays. You should write more and sign your name to your stuff."

He always said "the king's English" with a touch of self-satisfied unction, as though he were proud of sharing with this "king" the guardianship of their common language. John Austin would somewhat wearily push from his forehead the one strand of blond hair that had a habit of falling across it, and say: "Oh, I don't know. I've done a few stories, but I don't think they amount to much." Hooker would shake his head. "You're not the best judge. Try the stories out. Send them to the *Atlantic*, though even the

Atlantic is not by any means what it used to be." There the matter would rest.

Out of his small, glass-walled den of an office adjoining the large, reeking reporters' room John Austin would stroll out into Capitol Square. And it would happen to him now and then that, instead of going on to his luncheon or his dinner, he would be held, as by an invisible hand, near the dusty lawns that surrounded the spuriously Roman state Capitol. He would stand quite motionless and gaze, and by a sudden process for which he could not account a stillness would flood him to the innermost chambers of his mind—a stillness that detached him from the busy scene about him and cut him off utterly from any concern with it, and yet displayed it to him with a preternatural clarity. He saw the prominent citizens who passed the corner of High and Broad Streets in the guise of self-important mannikins strutting in a remote region, or as though they had been put under glass merely for his eye. Yet by virtue of this stillness and detachment he seemed to be able to see into the very machinery of their being, and it needed no memory of the various bits of exact gossip that had inevitably come his way to tell him the stories of their deals and hypocrisies and fears and

stealthy goings-on with political crooks or with women. He knew. He saw. And this mood of impersonal visionary absorption in the spectacle of life became increasingly precious to him. But he was wise enough neither to lie in wait for it nor to try to induce it. All he knew was this, that aloneness and moderation of speech were favorable to it, and hence, although he was only thirty-two years old, he drifted more and more into solitariness and silence.

At night this mood, if it came upon him, retained its character, although the content of his vision changed. Now the streets were nearly emptied and were divided into great, dark masses cut, at regular intervals, by the large radiance of the swinging electric lights. He would gaze at the thousand thin spears of whiteness into which each lamp's core of light was shattered; he would gaze at the varied dark forms of houses and trees. And as the motions and the thoughts of men entered into him and became part of him by day, so by night he would gain a visionary knowledge of the forms of the things that fill the world. But either kind of knowledge remained to him inexpressible in words and he could establish no relation between his moods of vision and the feeble

literary efforts with which his spare hours were busied.

It is a curious circumstance that this lack of relationship between the two major forces of his more intimate life never rose sharply into his consciousness. He continued to write verses in the manner of Austin Dobson; he continued to translate Horace from the worn text-book of his college days; his tentative stories had a Stevensonian ring or a Meredithian twist. His living city filled his vision; from his pen dripped a diluted perfume of withered roses.

But it must not be supposed that John Austin was a fool. At college he had fallen under the influence of a teacher of intense but limited and stagnant tastes: a small, ruddy gnome of a man who had, long ago, been a favorite pupil of George Edward Woodberry, a *protégé* of Richard Watson Gilder in the genteel days of the *Century*, and had published a volume of late Victorian verse. His literary eminence was a legend in the city. Young Austin had taken all of the courses offered by this teacher. He was not unaware now of the man's limitations. What allied him to that teacher still was an unconquerable love of beauty and fitness and precision of speech. He didn't put it

that way himself. But he started one day to read a modern American play that had been much praised in the East, and found that on the first page of the preface the author had written "suspicioned." He put the book away. He tried to read a novel by another of the younger revolutionary set in American letters. The man, a self-taught one, no doubt, wrote, "in a thryce" and committed other incredible solecisms.

It will now be supposed that if John Austin was no fool he was at least a pedant. But that would be a shallow view. There are natures born with an instinctive apprehension of the mystery of form. They know that though form does not necessarily and in the lower and commoner sense involve beauty, it involves emphasis and order—an emphasis and an order which, by virtue of their own character, clarify and render intelligible the humblest subject matter that the artist may select. They know that there are no vulgar subjects, provided the artist is no vulgar one, nor any mean subjects, provided the artist is not ignoble, that, for instance, the difference between a literary and pornographic treatment of love is a difference of style, of form, and that style and form are the mirrored images of the artist's mind and temper.

I do not pretend that John Austin expressed himself in quite such terms. Nor need the reader fear that this story is in any danger of becoming either a treatise or a diatribe. We must, however, place our young man, both psychically and physically; we must understand why a reporter on the staff of a paper in a city of the Middle West, surrounded by the agitation, the grime, the smoky and uncertain splendor of life itself, wrote like a secluded and elderly gentleman in an English garden. John Austin's life had no contact with the forms of which, in however feeble a fashion, he was master. And he could find no one in his time and place who had, so far as he could see, created new forms—new modes of emphasis and order—which he could borrow for the flesh upon his visions. One eminent contemporary had triumphed through sheer bulk and force, another through the incisiveness of his ironic vision. There were others who were themselves fumbling and uncertain; still others whom our young man found both badly mannerized and flatly unintelligible. He returned always to the things he truly liked: the prose of Santayana, the Oxford books of verse, his shabby old Horace. He would really have liked to write something

that would last not only this year, but many—*quod et hunc in annum vivat et plures;* he was under no illusions as to his own stuff. He knew it to be agreeable rubbish.

One person there was who believed in the value of his scribblings, whose admiration, indeed, was a constant irritant to him, who had driven him to leave his paternal roof and was not guiltless of sending him upon that pilgrimage with which our story deals. Yet without that person he remains unintelligible, remains a figment and incredible. That person was his mother.

Mrs. Austin, now in her middle fifties, long widowed, was small and shapeless and homely. She had a little potato of a nose which, quite without a bridge, appeared suddenly in the middle of her face. Her mouth was very large and in incessant motion; she was unimaginable, silent. From her chin straggled three long hairs. Her eyes alone were good—a pleasant gray, quite large, good-humored, and intelligent. Except when she read—luckily she read a good deal—or slept, she talked. And at the oddest and most inappropriate moments she punctuated her conversation with a long, monotonous, giggling, foolish laugh.

That laugh wronged her. The woman had a

mind. She had been one of the first women in Ohio to take a higher degree at the state university; she had fought for women's rights long before it was fashionable or even decent; she was free of all the current theological and political orthodoxies, had been during many years an ardent parishioner of the ultra-liberal Washington Gladden, had kept her head even during the World War and deprecated the viler forms of the then prevalent psychosis. But though she had a certain lucidity of mind, she had no emotional depth or experience. She was a prohibitionist because it could be proved that alcohol even in small quantities is physiologically deleterious; she insisted on complete pre-marital purity for men as well as for women because that was just and sane and becoming and offered the securest hope of a healthy posterity. You could not refute her, for her arguments were or appeared scientific and exact. To the wilder, more passionate, more creative aspects of human nature she was wholly blind.

Her influence upon her only child was enormous, was deeper than he knew. She had brought him up with a quiet, well-bred sense of their superiority, of their enlightenment amid the surrounding provincialities. She made fun of John's

teachers at the university. "Does Tony Haynes still teach in the Methodist Sunday school? Hee-hee-hee-hee-hee. What an intelligent occupation for a biochemist!" "The thought of Burrows still teaching philosophy is funny. He was a fossil in my time." No wonder that John never thought of the possibility of any division between them until one day—he was eighteen—it came over him that she really intended him to be a chemist and had never dreamed of his failing to carry out her precise and clear plans. It was at breakfast and the day was the beginning of a new scholastic year. He showed her the printed form-card on which he had marked the studies he meant to pursue.

"But, John, it's all English and Latin and philosophy!"

He hadn't been very articulate.

"Yes, mother."

"The future belongs to science. You know that as well as I do. Look at all these people around here. What do they need? They need a scientific outlook more than anything else. And science is so fascinating. I thought you did such good work in physiological chemistry last semester

and Pell is one of the really able men on the campus."

He got up and, hating to face her, looked out of the window at the three Lombardy poplars in their yard.

"I'm sorry, mother, but I don't believe I've got a mind for that sort of thing. Honest I don't."

For once she hadn't laughed.

"Well, what are you planning to do?"

She had insisted a thousand times on the necessity of freedom for the young to choose their own careers, plan their own lives. She couldn't—and in this inability lay the woman's real worth—she couldn't, even though it hurt, be false to her principles now.

"What?" she repeated.

John felt weak and miserable and defeated even though he knew he was gaining his point.

"I think I'll go in for journalism, mother."

"You're quite sure, John, that that's what you want to do?"

"I think so."

He knew it sounded feeble.

"I do hope you know your own mind." She was silent for a full minute. Then two queer little red spots appeared on her cheeks.

"John!"

"Yes, mother."

"You're sure there's nothing in your life, that nothing has happened to you to make this change in you?"

Something in him was outraged. He'd been pure, all right. He hated that word. It seemed nasty to him, somehow. But he had been. And it hadn't been so simple. He flushed. He cried out:

"There hasn't been any change. I always did hate the stinking stuff. Leave me alone!"

He barely heard her hurt and quivering, "You're acting like a child, John!" He rushed from the room, cranked up the Ford runabout in the yard, and drove at furious speed out to their little summer shack on the Scioto River.

He lay down in the warm, faded September grass and listened to a familiar bird-note in an autumnal tree beside the little river. He had an impulse to sob. But he reflected that he was too old to cry. He lay face downward and looked at the grass and lost himself in that act of contemplation in which anger and grief and time all faded and in which he and the grass under his eyes became blessedly one in an equal tranquillity.

II

NEVER thereafter had these two been quite at one again. To John Austin that scene at the breakfast table had often reappeared with a grave and pathetic clearness. It arose before him: his mother's startled face, the oval daguerreotype of his grandfather above it against the faintly salmon-tinted wall, the dishes with their rims of deep blue, his own napkin thrown feverishly on the table, the window and the poplars waving slowly in the morning wind. He could smell the slight aroma of coffee, and to this day could feel the blind heat in which he had driven through the streets and fields. He could hear that bird note, forlorn across the years, and smell the warm odor of earth and grass. The scene assumed the pathos of the long ago, a pathos that clung to his mother since that day. Her defeat was necessary; it made her subtly pitiful to him.

She had, in point of fact, been extraordinarily loyal both to her own principles and to him. She had interested herself in his studies no less than

before; with a touch of conciliatory overeagerness she had insisted on seeing his themes and compositions. He had caught her one night turning over the pages of an old Latin grammar to refresh her knowledge of the language with which, in his quiet way, he became more and more concerned.

Her overeagerness assumed in his consciousness something of the character of a pursuit. Perhaps, he had reflected in later years, he had transferred this sense of pursuit from one matter to another. Oh, he had always had a latchkey to the house behind its lawn south of the university, the homelike, comfortable, unpretentious house—the house of enlightened purity and freedom of mind on all subjects that didn't so much count. But the house had held him captive wherever he was. At fifteen his mother, proud of this tremendous deed of enlightenment, had come up to his room. She had talked with an enforced matter-of-factness. "Scientific attitude . . . unfortunate women . . . dreadful diseases . . . total paralysis . . . poor little blind babies. . . ." He had squirmed on his chair. "I know, mother . . . I understand . . . of course. . . ." In a vague way he had understood, to be sure. Nevertheless, her scientific luridness had hit the mark. And unfortunately he had,

almost immediately thereafter, in connection with physical examinations for gymnasium work, come in contact with whispered rumors of disease among members of one of the flashier fraternities of the East High School which he was then attending.

The latchkey handed to him when later on he entered college did him little good. Melanie, when she came, did him little good—Melanie of the candy shop across from the campus, who flirted with all the boys, but, as he saw and dared not see, most luringly with him; Melanie of the reddish, maddening hair, the round, white little shoulders from which her waists had a delirious habit of slipping down on the upper arm, the pursed, silly, adorable, lip-sticked mouth.

He was nineteen in the days of Melanie. He wanted to take her out. He heard the boys talk about her and an arrow seemed to pierce his entrails. They made sly allusions. He wanted to listen closely and ask questions and affected indifference while he grew hot and cold. He wanted to say, "Damn the consequences!" Instead he quoted Horace to himself:

"*Quid sit futurum cras, fuge quaerere. . . .*" It helped him little. His innocence in the face of life had been definitely crippled. He fell into

deeper shame by remarking on these goings-on to Mrs. Austin. It bears witness to her own simple-mindedness, despite her intelligence, that she did not mark the cry of misery beneath this feigned and false high-mindedness in her son. He, inevitably, resented her as the bland accomplice of his shame. And when, at that period, she wanted to see his verses, proud of the thought that he was going to be a poet, too, he was querulous to her and unmotivatedly bitter and harsh. How, after his great hypocrisy to which she had consented, could he show her the awkward, passionate stammer of his verse of which there was, though never named, but one subject: Melanie, Melanie, the girl from the candy shop. Reluctantly he showed his mother scraps of translations of Horace that he had made. But he kept to himself the telltale ones:

"Gladly with thee I'd live and gladly die. . . ."
"*Tecum vivere amen, tecum obeam libens.* . . ."
He, as far as Mrs. Austin was concerned, took no interest in such things. He was, as she desired him to be, high-minded and pure. So he withdrew, hid himself from her, prayed for spring and summer and the refuge of the shack on the Scioto River.

In quite recent years she had urged him to marry. But he had quieted down, had a good hold on himself, had seen something of the life about him, and had come to the conclusion that his was a disciplined and not highly passionate nature. His visions and absorptions, his meditative hours—these he found the best things in the world. If his mother pried and gabbled, how much more would a wife? Dimly he knew that these considerations would melt into nothingness at the command of love. But love did not come to him. The young unmarried women in his mother's enlightened sorority or in the American Association of College Women were all, as he formulated it now, so confoundedly intellectual and unhuman and fundamentally a little stupid. They didn't know half as much as they thought they did. Oh, Columbus had its fast social set with which he had his fleeting contacts. He liked these worldly-minded, sporty girls and women even less. Retrospectively he knew that at college he had known a few girls of a different type from either of these. He had been too inhibited then even to come to know them better. All that lay in the past. In the Intercollegiate Socialist Society there had been a small Russian girl with coronal braids of black that had

facets like onyx when the sun shone on them; there had been an Irish girl from Cleveland with a brooding depth in her blue eyes. How far these figures had withdrawn in the garish clatter of Columbus life, in the "writing up" of addresses, lectures, the visit of an art theater company, the grind of reviewing "newsily" and kindly!

For several years, moreover, he had been troubled by the problem of how to leave his mother's house. She talked, as the years went on, with an ever more incessant ardor and monotony. No catastrophe of man or nature had the power to change her views or deepen her insight. Her sudden unmotivated giggle began the day and ended it. Moreover, she assumed that her son had no reserves from her, no secret garden of the mind or heart in which he preferred to dwell alone. She scattered meditation; she insisted on reading aloud to him choice passages from her book of the moment, whatever his mood. She pretended to treat him as a comrade; she would have been shocked if he had ever failed to use the respectful courtesy of a son. How the deuce, he often said to himself, was he to get away?

In the end the thing came about quite simply. In spite of her stringently hygienic life—a tem-

perate vegetarianism was among her principles—Mrs. Austin found the recurrent twinges and minor cripplings of her rheumatism harder and harder to bear. She had disliked admitting the ailment that seemed to defeat one of her favorite notions of a rational life. She was finally forced to do so and was ordered to spend the greater part of a winter at Hot Springs, Virginia. She and John talked back and forth about what was to be done in her absence. John, not quite ingenuously, declared he couldn't assume responsibility for the house and the two maids, that everything would be topsy-turvy, that his mother would find a mess on her return.

They closed the house, and John Austin, in the pleasant hush into which he slipped, rented a large room in the Indianola district east of the university campus and moved into it with a trunk of clothes, a few dozen books, and a Corona typewriter. It was a great adventure for him. He had space for the first time in his life, since all the space he had was indisputably his own. Time took on an adventurous beauty. He could divide it at his own will. If the duties of his job permitted it, he could read in bed in the morning until noon. He could linger on the way home from late assign-

ments. There was no one anxious whether he returned at midnight or not. He could drink in the nocturnal streets at will. There was no one to say, "Breakfast is getting cold, John," or, "I wouldn't smoke so much if I were you," or, "You look seedy. Can't you manage to get more sleep before midnight?" Ah, he had escaped the tyranny of love. His window could be the only orange hole in the dark velvet of the street. He could lean out of it, his pipe between his teeth. He was, in a deep sense, a frugal chap. He had all he wanted now, though it was dealt by fate with so sparing a hand. But what more did one want? His favorite poet had, as always, the inevitable word for this matter, too: "*Bene est cui Deus obtulit parca quod satis est manu.*"

He had another source of quiet satisfaction. He had the people from whom he rented his room. He had the Earnharts. True, they were three and his mother had been only one. But they had no rights over him; there was no bond of affection between him and them. There was no obligation of any kind. He could watch them and listen to them as long as he liked, as long as the mood was on him. Then he could turn away.

He had been extraordinarily secluded in his

mother's set, which was also the university set and also the set of the editors of his paper. Refined people, all of them. Yes, they still, perhaps in memory of the frontier and their rude grandfathers and great-grandfathers of the frontier, used the word. Refined, cultured, proud of smooth surfaces, of having gone to college here or even East, of having shed the grosser superstitions of the Ohio country. Estimable people. But John suspected dimly that the thinness and remoteness of his stories had something to do with his seclusion within this set. It, too, he didn't doubt, would find its sacred bard some day and thus not fade into the long night of things forgotten. But he was not Jane Austen, only John Austin.

The first morning on which he awoke in the Earnhart house he had a pleasant thrill. A screen door banged metallically below. A deep, easy, well-lubricated female voice rose suddenly, "Can't you see, Grace, that the cat wants out?"

Dimly he remembered hearing that central Ohio locution from farmer boys in his freshman year. It gave him, now, he didn't know why, an extraordinary satisfaction. He had rented the room from the daughter of the house, a large, fat, sullen girl. She must be Grace, he argued. The almost gran-

diose voice he had just heard must be her mother's.

On his way out he had met Mrs. Earnhart. She was enormous, ash-blond, faded. She filled the door, so that he was for the moment helpless. She assaulted him with speech:

"Hope you slept all right, Mr. Austin. The street is nice and quiet, don't you think? Yes sir, I always did like the Indianola district, always did. We used to live on the east side. But I said, let's move up north and take one of them new houses. Sure they cost more. But we can rent a room. Course, we coulda taken a smaller house and gotten along. But I said, it's better to live like you want to live *and* rent a room than to squeeze into something that don't really suit you. Now, ain't that right, Mr. Austin?"

She shook a little as she spoke; a little saliva ran from the small mouth embedded between the mountainous cheeks. For some reason John rejoiced in her quietly but hugely. She was gigantically if intermittently voluble and her volubility consisted largely in emphasizing the gentility of herself and her family.

John was delighted when, that evening, he met Mr. Earnhart, who was precisely what, somehow, he should have been—a shortish, spare, dark,

grizzled, quiet man, shipping clerk in a wholesale drug house downtown. Mr. Earnhart was so obviously obliterated by his women. In the evening, if the weather was mild enough, he would sit on the steps of the porch—never in a chair—and smoke a pipe—smoking in the parlor was not permitted—and read the sporting page of the *Sentinel*.

Often, in the course of the fall, John joined him there for a few minutes. Mr. Earnhart took a liking to him and talked over his paper. In addition to the sporting page he would read the society news and comment.

"Did you see here where the Wagenbauers, Missis and Miss, have gone to Paris for the winter? Yeh, they got it soft now. I remember when I was a boy the old man—this one's father, you know—puttin' up patent medicine with his own hands in a barn down where Front Street is now. You wouldn't hardly believe it, but it's a fac'." Mr. Earnhart spat. "Well, sir, they got millions now. It takes luck, that's what it takes, 's my father used to say. He come from Kentucky to Cincinnati. 'Boy,' he used to say, 'if you got no luck your name is mud.' Not 's if I cared about bein' a millionaire, understand. But it ain't much

of a life for a man these days. The company pays me forty dollars a week. What do you get for that now? And the wife, she naturally's got ambitions for Grace to be a peeanist and wants to live nice. I don't blame her. Wouldn't be so bad if a man could get a glass of beer the way he used to. Oh, I guess prohibition is all right. I see where it says that bank deposits are increasing and where the laboring men are buying automobiles instead of booze. Well, all I c'n say is, I got no bank deposit and no automobile, nor I don't see where I'm likely to get 'em." He laughed softly and ironically. Then, usually, Mrs. Earnhart's voice would boom:

"Henry, switch off that porch light! The electric bill was something fierce last time!"

Henry Earnhart would turn to John with a grin.

"Guess it was fierce all right, all right."

Then he would knock out the ashes from his pipe against his heel.

III

GRACE was a nuisance in the early days of John Austin's stay with the Earnharts. She dropped her habitual sullenness, which was her standing protest against what she considered her parents' shameful lack of refinement, position, and wealth, whenever by any chance she met him. She would feign a sweet pensiveness and brush against him. Then she would feign wide-eyed, virginal surprise and confusion. "Oh, I *beg* your pardon, Mr. Austin." She was quite what her mother had been at sixteen—a fat, bulky girl, large and colorless, more appetizing only through the freshness of youth. Her ambitions to be a pianist were, luckily, exercised during John's absence from the house. He understood from Mrs. Earnhart, in addition, that these ambitions were not ardent; that they were, in fact, her own rather than her daughter's. To Mrs. Earnhart the possession of a piano seemed to be the stamp and proof of the gentility to which she aspired. Once and once only, on a Sunday evening, John Austin had been ensnared

into the parlor. Mrs. Earnhart had leaned back in her rocking-chair with dignity. She had waved her hand in a queenly fashion.

"Let's have a selection, Grace."

Grace, trying to be coy, had succeeded in being more ungainly than was her wont. She had lumbered to the piano with many a languishing sigh and self-conscious giggle. Then suddenly she had plunged into "The Scarf-Dance" of Chaminade with a mechanical insensibility of the facile sweetishness of even that "selection." Her technique was primitive; her self-assurance amusing. But John watched Mrs. Earnhart with fascinated eyes. Her daughter was "rendering a selection" on the piano. The piano and the furnishings of the parlor, both bought on the installment plan, were paid. Forgotten were the scrimping and saving of the long years, forgotten the ignominy of having to rent a room in order to live the way she liked to live, forgotten the humble position in life and meager wage of her husband. Triumph and dignity suffused the broad bosom of Mrs. Earnhart. She let her hand dangle over the arm of her rocking-chair and waved time, out of time, to the rhythmical horrors that her daughter was perpe-

trating and felt, as she would herself have put it in intimate moments, every inch a lady.

John Austin never wearied of watching the Earnharts. He came to know all their ways of speech and thought; he came to have a special sense for them by virtue of which he perceived the fears and monitions and instincts which they did not acknowledge to themselves. He knew how, in their pursuit of gentility, each urged on by the other, the mother and daughter were gradually exceeding the means of their single breadwinner; he saw the tricks and shifts by which they kept any suspicion of this fact from Mr. Earnhart. Late at night he occasionally met Grace coming flushed and hot from a dance in a frock of the very existence of which her father was ignorant. He heard morning conferences between mother and daughter.

"Well, ma, every other girl has one. I don't *care* where you get the money. I jussassoon go to work."

She was, as a matter of fact, extremely slothful. But that threat always conquered Mrs. Earnhart. To have her daughter go to work would have been to undo the long fight of the years, the long hard striving toward gentility. Somehow she managed

to supply Grace's wants and to push off a day of reckoning and catastrophe a little longer.

John Austin was still in the first stages of his lingering absorption in the human scene beneath his eyes; he was still tasting the sweetness, the long-drawn-out sweetness, of his frugal freedom when his mother returned home. He went to the Union Station to meet her. He was early and the train was late. He was rather glad of it, for he was fond of the lofty yet dingy place, the great vaulted hall of stained and smoky marble full of people coming from trains, going to trains, waiting, often wearily, on the heavy wooden benches. These weary ones, he knew, were the travelers in day coaches, members of that vast majority of the people who have never seen the inside of a parlor or a Pullman car and who, despite their overwhelming masses, seem so remote and unimaginable to the cribbed and cabined middle-class mind. He wondered how it would be traveling all night in a day coach, a smoking car, with men from all parts of the vast country. What characters one could note; what stories one could hear! He had wondered often before. But something—perhaps it was his refined and sheltered boyhood—kept him adventurous only in mind. What excuse could

he have given for vaguely vagabonding about the country? The Broadway Limited for a vacation in New York! That was splendid. And he had availed himself of the opportunity on several occasions. He had stopped at the Hotel McAlpin, where he had always met acquaintances from Columbus; had gone to plays, to a cabaret or two; had visited the great establishments of the metropolitan dailies; and had always had, in the end, a baffled and defeated feeling. How life, he reflected, the life of one's town and class and family, did cage a fellow! Not, to be sure, through any external command or pressure, but by the silent infiltration of the prevalent point of view, prejudices, fears, inhibitions, into one's own mind.

He strolled over to the blackboard on which the time of the arrival of the incoming trains was noted. No, his mother's train had sustained no further delay. He looked at his watch. In eight minutes the train would be here. And suddenly a stealthy fear which had been lying in wait within him leaped up. He loved his mother. No doubt of that. She was, he told himself, almost articulating the words under his breath—she was a woman in a thousand. But he could not leave the Earnharts and his freedom and his long ab-

sorptions in people and things. He could not, simply could not return to her talk and her warnings and her care for his health and comfort and "normalcy" of life and conversation.

Before he had a chance to reflect on this sudden conviction the train crier had announced her train. John Austin hurried to the iron gate which, open at last, emitted first a few swift stragglers and then a solid, slowly moving mass of people. In a moment he saw the small form of his mother. In another she was kissing him and talking.

"I did have such a good trip, John. And I feel so much improved. Hi-hi-hihihi. You're looking most awfully well yourself. Did you telephone the Sumners as I asked you to? I dare say the awnings are in a dreadful state. We must have them repaired. And I think—don't you?—that now would be a good time to have the repapering done. Yes, do take this book. I've been reading it all day. It's very ably done, oh, very ably. But don't you think the subject matter of Blunt very disagreeable this time? He started out with such a sense of beauty. But that's what our contemporaries seem to rate lowest of all."

John, as a matter of fact, rather shared his mother's view. But her expression of it somehow

irritated him, drove him emotionally, at least, to favor the contrary opinion, and made him wonder at the same moment whether, within this coil of slight but definite irritations and contradictions, he could ever arrive at clear and objective notions of his own at all. He clung desperately, with a craftiness scarcely conscious to himself, to her plan for repapering the house. That, he said, was a great idea. Had there been any repapering, he asked, as far back as he could remember? More cheerful papers were needed. The walls in his bedroom still bore the ink splotches of his careless boyhood. He laughed and knew that both his eagerness and the laugh were unlike himself, and was shocked but not surprised at his mother's sudden, unwonted silence and the shrewd, slightly frightened glance she gave him out of the corner of her eye.

They drove home in a taxicab which rattled and whirred and kept upsetting Mrs. Austin's hat box on their feet. John was acutely aware of his mother's forlornness. But he was grateful to remember from all his experiences that she was not the woman to plunge luxuriously into such a feeling and nurse it and make capital of it. Some ways, he knew, she was an awful fool, poor dear. But

she had, in other ways, not only intelligence, but a certain gallantry in the face of life.

At home, over their cup of tea, Mrs. Austin at once drove straight to the point.

"I see you don't want to come back home to live, John."

"I wouldn't put it that way, mother."

Why hadn't he prepared himself better? What an ass he was to be fumbling and playing for time in this way, like a small boy caught at the jam shelf in the pantry!

Mrs. Austin put her hand on his arm.

"John dear, I don't want to pry. At your age you don't even owe me an accounting. But if you stay in that furnished room now, it'll put me in a very embarrassing position. I'm not even talking about my own feelings, you see. All I want you to do is to help me out a bit. You know how people are and the questions I'll be expected to answer."

John pushed back his chair from the table a little and leaned forward and let his folded hands hang between his knees. The bough of a tree brushed rustlingly against a windowpane. The black-marble clock on the mantel of the fireplace ticked and ticked. His head seemed empty except

for pictured images of the past—that memorable morning scene of his boyhood in this very room; the rosy, creamy-shouldered Melanie behind her candy counter; the peace of grasses and trees and running water and wide, slightly rolling fields beside the Scioto River. And these scenes all seemed, despite their intimacy, strangely far and remote from him, and this very room and moment seemed already to have withdrawn into the past with its small clearness and shy pathos. He did not look up. He heard himself presently talking, unraveling rather the skeins in his deeper consciousness.

"I think my life's been rather futile and aimless, mother. I got the idea that by living all alone and just yielding to my moods I could do more work or, at least, better work. I'm tired of the *Sentinel*. I know I've got a sort of a future there. I know I could get Hooker's job some day. But I don't want that. Maybe I haven't any talent; maybe I have. Nobody can tell. But here's the fact: I don't know enough about life to write, for one thing. For another, I can't get my American material into the forms of literature which I more or less command. Unless you're a rowdy, American life doesn't give you a chance for the sort of experience that the artist needs. And the

fellows who have lived rowdy lives and have the material, haven't the form and just stammer."

"Yes, yes?" Mrs. Austin tried not to be too eager.

"Well, living alone and just mooning about has been very pleasant. But I won't lie and say that it's made any great difference in my problem."

Mrs. Austin's face brightened up.

"Well, then?"

John straightened himself up and faced his mother.

"I think I'll throw up my job and go abroad for a while."

The truth is he had played with the idea for a long time. But he had only played with it. He had heard, of course, of colonies of young American writers in Paris and elsewhere; of maturer, individual writers living largely abroad. But he had never, somehow, definitely faced a plan. His city, his mother, his home had had their soft, strong chains about him—the chains of the usual, the expected. At the moment he uttered the words, however, he knew that he had been drifting toward this plan, this solution, this escape for years. It was delightful now to see his mother brighten up into her quite accustomed self.

"I think that's an awfully good plan of yours, John. Hee-hee-heeheehee. Awfully good. I'm not so sure that I agree with your explanation about America and the artist. I don't think Howells was a rowdy; I don't think Booth Tarkington is, and yet *Alice Adams*, for instance, is a wonderfully strong book. Of course, if you're thinking of Dreiser and that group there may be something in what you say. And I always fancied you wanted to be a poet. Still, I do think it would be fine for you to go abroad and test your theories. When do you think of going?"

A remnant of the old lethargy of the usual and the easy made him say, instead of "right off," "This spring, I think."

Mrs. Austin nodded emphatically.

"That's fine." Then she leaned forward a little pleadingly. "Then there's no reason for embarrassing me, is there, John dear? I'll interfere as little as possible."

He jumped up. What a good sort she was, when all was said and done! He put an arm about her shoulder—a rare and shy gesture. They were not demonstrative people.

"I'll pack my duds first thing to-morrow and give the poor old Earnharts notice. I'll come

home Saturday. That won't give you much time for your repapering, though."

"Repapering," she teased back. "Much you care about that! By the way, John, have you any idea where you're going? Paris?"

He shook his head. He felt free, young, strangely inspired. The first touches of autumn had always given him that feeling. Never so strongly as in this hour.

"No, no. Not to Paris. What the younger Americans who hang around Paris are trying to do stumps me completely. I'm too stupid. That's all. It's not for me. If I'm to get any good out of my trip I must somehow strike out for myself." He stopped. He knew suddenly. Oh, he had always known where he wanted to go. Soracte white with snow . . . the swift Annio and the groves of Tibur . . . the *Via Sacra* and the Appian road . . .

"I'm going to Rome, mother, to Rome, of course."

Delight flooded him, brimmed in him.

Rome . . . Rome. . . .

IV

JOHN AUSTIN had occasion enough during the winter that followed to recall this decisive conversation with his mother. He was contented with its final result; there were details that, in retrospect, made his cheeks burn. He didn't think the modern American realists "rowdies." Heaven knows he didn't. He admired and envied their brave lives with all his heart. He remembered—and his cheeks burned the harder—how, in the grip of his passion for the rosy Melanie, he had pretended loftily to his mother to be above such interests. The same thing—for was it not the very same thing?—had happened again. Instinctively making a concession to what his mother and her circle and all the genteel people of his city expected, he had deprecated the very thing for which, deeply and steadily, he yearned. In a flash, brooding in his room at home one night, it came to him that here was precisely what foreigners, what the new American revolutionaries, called the hypocrisy of the Anglo-American. He had always repudiated

the reproach, thinking of some gross and violent, some Pecksniffian feigning of which he himself and all the people he, at least, knew were wholly innocent. Ah, it wasn't that at all. It was something subtler but perhaps deadlier. It was making concessions to false and artificial expectations against one's better knowledge and belief; it was a selling of one's intimate convictions for propriety, respect, a smooth path. It was getting on some band wagon when one's heart was far away. Why, why—at this point he grabbed his head with both hands—he was worse than the grotesque Luella Earnhart. For she at least believed in the shoddy gods to whom she sacrificed. He didn't believe in Columbus and its ideals; he didn't believe in the laws and prophets of the First Congregational Church. Yet his sacrificial smoke helped to darken the air. Of course he must get away. Of course America, at least *his* America, was no place for an artist. Thank goodness that his father had left money enough for both his mother and himself to be independent in a modest way. Oh, that he had fled before, long ago!

He did, to be sure, have his own quarrel with these modern writers of his country. He read a good many of their books again during this winter

that dragged, that would not pass in its eternal alternations of snow and slush. So many of them were formless, formless on the lowest plane; so many of them, especially of those who had finer artistic instincts, were unintelligible. To him, at least. He read, among other things, the newly collected verses of an American lady who, married to a distinguished English man of letters, had gradually built up a very great reputation. Her superficial neo-classicism attracted him. He admitted the lithe and lucid loveliness of an hundred phrases. But when he asked himself, in the end, what the devil any individual poem meant, what this extraordinarily gifted woman was driving at, he had no answer. Maybe he was a stupid fellow. But he never had the same difficulty with Horace or Shelley or A. E. Housman or Whitman. No, it couldn't be entirely his own fault. Not entirely. Nor did it bring him help when in the Sibilline books of another American woman—intense, brave, utterly sincere and high-minded in intention—he was told that he ought to forget Horace and Shelley and write like an Amerindian. He didn't relish unrhythmed verse, anyhow. Rhyme wasn't necessary. He mulled over his Horace. He knew that. But he wanted the *lucidus ordo* of his old

favorite and he wanted poetry to touch him somehow. Horace! The old boy knew. "It isn't enough for poems to be beautiful; they must have charm! They must sway the reader's soul in whatever direction they would!" Oh, there was poetry that met the test, met it admirably. There was a certain professor at Wisconsin; there was Edna Millay. But on the other hand there was the icily fertile Amy Lowell, self-appointed and widely accepted dictator in the realms that had once been the Muses'. Those cataracts of glittering, well-chosen words made his head ache. Too much, too much. Cold fury and the excess of a fundamental impotence of expression. He mulled over his Horace. Images? *Fulgentia signis castra*—in three words the splendor and the panoply of power. "Fields which the quiet Lyris, taciturn river, bites with its wave. . . ."

He mulled over his Horace. He stamped through snow and slush on his appointed tasks. He grew thin with longing for the spring. He would stop suddenly at the old, familiar corner of High and Broad Streets and the houses seemed to be made of some transparent material. For he did not see them. He saw straight through them.

And at the end of the vista of his dreamlike vision beheld the seven hills of the Eternal City.

It is arguable, as we have granted before, that John Austin was a muddle-headed young man. Certain it is that he carried with him and within him the possibilities of a terribly belated adolescence. A wiseacre might even suggest that his longing for Rome, which was like a pain, yet had a stinging sweetness alternating with languor, was in point of fact the transference to an ideal object of a yearning of a much more earthy kind. It suffices to assert that John Austin's consciousness was utterly clean of any such suspicion. He wasn't aware of any abnormality in his development. His mother, his friends, his city, had seen to that. And if anyone reply that we are asserting a thing impossible, the objector but shows his ignorance of American life among those genteel, well-educated, largely Anglo-American middle classes who read the *Atlantic Monthly* and buy books and support many good causes and are too honorable to engage in politics and *would have* voted for La Follette if he had been a shade less "radical" and are an ornament of the Republic in every way and fill the ranks of the liberal professions and crowd the faculties of our institutions of higher learning and,

utterly divided from the dark, rabid and uncultured Fundamentalists, refuse to oppose repressive opinion and legislation on high and pure and moral grounds.

John Austin, at all events, was quite free to follow his fancies. His mother showed a surprising delicacy of perception, a surprising tact. She curbed her speech; she made it as impersonal as possible. She tried to interfere as little as possible with whatever process was going on in her son's mind. She wanted him to feel that in future, if he chose not to found a household of his own, he could live with her and still be free.

He used some of this freedom, curiously enough, in order to call occasionally on the Earnharts. They had another lodger now in his old room. This lodger was a senior at the university, a smooth-faced, cool-eyed youth in well-tailored clothes and a low-crowned, conspicuously black and neat Derby hat set diagonally behind his ears. His name was "Bud" Holloway. He liked, as Mrs. Earnhart told John, to be kind of independent. That was the reason why he didn't live in a "frat" house, though he belonged, oh my, yes, he belonged to one of the "swellest" frats on the campus. "His father," Mrs. Earnhart elucidated

further, "owns one of the biggest plants in Toledo. Oh my, yes!" She smacked her lips in a new satisfaction. "I don't know how much money they got. I don't suppose they hardly know themselves. But I can tell you this much"—she bent forward and whispered, communicating her mighty secret—"that Bud gets a check for two hundred and fifty dollars every first o' the month that comes around." She straightened up again and laughed. And there was a note of vicarious triumph in her laugh. "And it ain't much that he's got left at the *end* of the month, I can tell you. No, sir, not much." Elegantly she leaned in her chair and rocked back and forth slowly and impressively. "Boys will be boys, as the sayin' is." She seemed to bulge with satisfaction. And John wondered whence this satisfaction in the "swell" and redoubtable "Bud" was derived. He knew "Bud" and his type well enough. A son of the newly rich, a pool-room and ice-cream parlor "sport" who hadn't the slightest desire or instinct for a liberal education, but came to college because it was the thing to do. The poor students would get small loans from him; the timid ones would borrow courage under his leadership for feeble dissipations. He would just scrape through his classes.

The more supine and slavish members of the faculty, especially old members of his own fraternity, would smooth his path. They would pretend that it was because he was a "fine chap," after all. Their real reason would be awe of the money, influence, conceivable acquaintance with trustees, of the elder Holloway of Toledo.

It was Mr. Earnhart who cleared up the mystery of his wife's beaming satisfaction. The cold prevented him from smoking his evening pipe on the porch. He walked up and down the little concrete path between the two patches of brown and ice-caked lawn in front of the house. There, while John Austin joined him one evening, he pointed with his pipe toward the dark porch and darker parlor.

"Got to go in through the back of the house. Grace in there with her feller. Sure it's 'Bud'! The wife says he sets a lot o' store by that girl. Well, I guess it's all right. She'll be on Easy Street if they get married. That's one sure thing." Then he added with a defensive surliness: "Not that I care. I never asked no favor of nobody yet. No, sir, never. An' if I had my way I don't know that I'd let this 'Bud' fool around the way he does. I sometimes think it ain't decent and he's a pretty

slick article. But you know how women are. If I was to say that to the wife, she'd tell me I had dirty thoughts, an' that 'Bud' was a real gentleman if ever there was one, and that I was blackening the character of my own flesh and blood. 'S far's I can see this 'Bud' is what my father used to call a 'tin-horn sport' in spite o' the fact that old Holloway is worth a cool million."

John agreed that Mr. Earnhart found himself in a difficult position. He hesitated. Who was he to give advice on such matters? But Mr. Earnhart seemed to cling to him.

"Why don't you ask Holloway straight out whether he considers himself engaged to Grace?"

Mr. Earnhart snickered.

"That's what I said I'd do. Well, sir, you oughta heard the wife. She said I'd spoil everything, that I was coarse an' no gentleman nor hadn't ever been none, and Grace, she let out a holler 's if you'd stuck a knife into her an' she wanted to know what *I* had to give her if I went an' ruined her chances. She said she hadn't any clothes on her back and couldn't do none o' the things other girls did, anyhow, an' a lot more talk o' the same kind. Funny. I was raised on a farm.

Guess I'm a back number. The wife can run this business, I suppose, better'n what I can."

This was, to John's regret, practically the last intimate contact he had with the affairs of the Earnhart family. Time, which had stood still during the greater part of that crucial winter, now threatened to race. Luckily, as he thought afterward, a curious circumstance, a circumstance belated in the structure of his life, came to hold up the torrent of time, came first to confuse and then to clarify his mind.

Was it his mother's doing? Was her consent to his departure more feigned than real? Was it deliberate planning on her part that brought him one day face to face in their own house with Ethel Wagenbauer? He knew these people vaguely; he had heard, what Mr. Earnhart, relying on the newspapers alone, did not know, that Ethel, the younger of the two Wagenbauer sisters, had not accompanied their mother to Europe. But to find her here, at home, was unusual, to say the least. She rather filled the drawing-room with her rustle, her expensive perfume, her overdone vitality. She didn't look like a young girl; she didn't look like a young matron. She seemed both fresh and yet somehow ravaged. She sat there ex-

posing to John's view enormous lengths of silk hose and two slightly bony knees.

"Your mother tells me you're going abroad in a few months." She waited for no answer but fixed on him her large, light, restless eyes. "I let my mother and sister go alone this winter. I find it a dreadful bore. My God! I know it all by heart. They're at the Hôtel de France et de Choiseul in Paris. They'll shop and go to tea at Sherry's and see the reviews. Then they'll go to Nice and walk on the Promenade des Anglais. Oh, it's lovely! But I can have a better time right here."

John felt a trifle morose.

"It all depends, doesn't it, on what you want and on what you call a good time?"

Ethel laughed. She turned to Mrs. Austin.

"Isn't he the dreadful highbrow, though?"

Mrs. Austin hee-heed more sympathetically to this than John would have thought her capable of doing. He wondered how the deuce the whole thing had happened, and couldn't, without being openly rude, refuse Ethel's invitation to a tea at her house. He thought later of excusing himself by letter. But his mother begged him to go.

He found a group of people in the dark, heavy drawing-rooms of the great brick "mansion" which

old Wagenbauer had built in the first flush of his wealth in the 'eighties. The cocktails, consisting mainly of synthetic gin, had apparently already flowed. Eyes were glassy and gestures lax. The women had an air of restrained abandon. They were on the edge of orgy, but dared not take the final leap. Ethel, whose arms were naked and whose skirts were even shorter than on that other day, devoted herself to John. He drank two cocktails, followed Ethel into a little side room and found himself close to her on a sofa. The unaccustomed liquor made him talkative; her scent and warmth stirred him. He poured out to her his plans and hopes and perplexities. Later his cheeks burned at the thought. But he had to admit that she had responded not without intelligence. Only she had used her sympathetic understanding as a means of physical approach. He had kissed her good-by and had made an engagement to take her out to dinner two days later.

She tempted him and disgusted him at the same time. He swore he would go to her no more, and went. He liked to kiss her and hold her in his arms, although he disliked her large face and large bones and her bold and ravaged air. She always drank heavily. But she was accustomed to liquor

and never broke through an ultimate restraint. When, at that ultimate moment, she tightened the reins, she would grow haggard in aspect and cynical in speech. And this monotonous process repeated itself until John felt profoundly that here, somehow, was a soul in torment. Late one evening, alone with her in the house—they had dined together at the Southern Hotel and had then come here—he asked her directly what was it that tormented her and gnawed at her and drove her on.

She was half reclining on a sofa; she stretched her bare arms across its side and looked at John. She gave a short, hard laugh. "Life is a little bit of hell, all right. Oh, you've found out that I'm not exactly happy, have you? And you condescend to wonder why? Well, in the first place I needn't tell you that my father was a Dutchman who made his money in the patent-medicine business?"

"What of it?" John asked.

She laughed again.

"Long before I grew up mother had insisted that father drop all his old friends. I don't know that I blame her. But it left us pretty high and dry. We were Dutch just the same, you know. All we could do was to get into the fast set that didn't care who you were so long as you had

money. And we could go to Europe. But I'm bored stiff there and I'm bored stiff here. I have nothing to do and just brains enough to know what a ghastly business it all is."

"Why haven't you gotten married?"

"Marry whom? A Dutchman? Or a bright young business man who wants to get on Easy Street with father's money and then go on drinking and petting? I can do without, thank you. I don't want children, either. They're a lot of trouble and there's no place for them."

"No place for them?" John was appalled. "But that's identifying silly social classifications with life itself."

She got up. She stood before him.

"You're right. I'm not as dumb as you think. And as you've been so condescending as to notice, I read, too. The fact is that you and people like you have stamped the German-Americans as second-class citizens and people, as Dutchmen. Well, when we make money we naturally try to get out from under. And that leaves us without pride and without decency, without friends and without country. Yes, without country. It's your country. We're Dutchmen. We stay hangers-on. Oh, it's our own fault. We should have stayed

among our own people. But it's too late for me to go back. The hundred-per-cent contempt for Dutchmen is in my bones now. I don't like them or their ways any more than you do."

She threw herself back on the sofa.

"You'd better go," she said. "And I don't know that you need come back. I think I'll go to Paris, after all."

Out in the dark street he stood still. He felt as though he had escaped a strange menace. What he had not escaped was the arrow that Ethel Wagenbauer had lodged in his mind. Here was still another aspect of American life which, in his isolation, he had not suspected. Oh yes, he had heard his mother say with lowered voice, "Of course you know what the Wagenbauers *were*." But the remark had not reached him as a comment upon another source of tragic confusion in American life. Only he hated to think about that now. The episode with Ethel, he felt suddenly, only intensified his desire to escape into some region of peace, of beauty, of art. With his old visionary gift he saw beyond the dark houses and streets of his native city the yellow Tiber and the seven hills.

V

TOWARD the end of March winds came with a touch of blossoms and the snow faded. Ethel, who had, for a space, held the days in leash, was gone. The weeks sped and crumbled. John sat much at home with an Italian grammar. But his eyes left the page and sought visions. For no reason at all his heart would begin to beat quite as it used to beat long ago at a smile of the well-remembered Melanie. His forehead would burn and his lips go dry and he could not help wondering what sort of a fool he was. Was it because Ethel had stirred his blood? Yet he remembered her with no delight. Rather her sense of homelessness here at home had intensified his own. He put his hand over his strangely throbbing heart and stood by the window and watched the dark Lombardy poplars straight against the blackish blue of the sky. Soon he would see cypresses instead. He felt like a man burning to go to his own place in a far country.

He wondered as to what it was that he really

wanted. Was it Rome or was it freedom? But, good heavens! was he not free? He could, when all was said and done, do as he liked. But had he, as a matter of fact, ever done as he liked? Hadn't he always done as his mother and the Reverend Washington Gladden—most liberal, to be sure, of all known clerics—expected him to act? Well, and if he had? Was not all such action in harmony with his own temper and his own convictions? Did he want to join the Wagenbauer set? Heaven forbid! Could he imagine himself living the lives reported of some of those modern American writers whom he didn't, of course, think rowdy at all? Ah, but did he really know anything about the quality of those lives? Wasn't the gossip that came to him filtered through mental sieves that caught only the dross and let the divine liquor spill? That was the grave question which the dark poplars could not answer, nor the stars above them, nor anyone he knew, nor his own disquieted heart. He turned to his Horace. But for once his old friend left him in the lurch and talked about being willing to die for dear friends and the fatherland.

The earlier winds of March were followed by rain. The world streamed; the trees tossed their

crowns wildly. John's restlessness grew. Yet at the core of that restlessness was a reluctance that actually kept him from buying his steamship ticket. He was, at certain hours, almost tempted to slip back into the effortlessness of his familiar life. Fortunately he knew the source of this temptation. His hope of his adventure was so high that he thought a disappointment or an inadequacy in the results would leave him intolerably stranded. He was staking his all upon a single throw of the dice of life. No wonder that he shrank from shaking the cup.

His all—what was it? He would not, in so many words, admit the fact even to himself. It was his quiet yet intense ambition. He had nothing to show to make the gesture of ambition otherwise than ridiculous. Yet his dream, his constant dream, was of some work of rounded and resonant beauty, firm and yet fresh of form, rooted in the soil of a great tradition, but rising into the brilliant western sunlight of his day and land. He hoped that this work would be in verse; he feared that it might have to take the form of prose. It seemed to him that he had been a dozen times on the edge of a vision of such a work. But his life in its pettiness, repression, and small confusions had al-

ways pulled him back. He saw himself in Rome; he saw the vision come; he saw execution follow. He saw and thought he knew and was obscurely afraid that there might be a mistake in his calculations.

All this sounds adolescent. But a prolonged touch of spiritual adolescence was precisely John Austin's difficulty, as it was also the source of his sharpest pleasures. In this respect he was at one with his world and so no singularity of condition made him conscious of his lack. The gray-bearded business men who "rooted" at baseball games, the professors at the state university who played with card catalogues and went to church on Sunday, the newspaper editorialists who hadn't a gleam of insight into the forces that actually ruled the world —these were all men with the emotional reactions of adolescents. They used the very vocabulary of boyhood and its games, never the grave words or thoughts of men. John Austin thought he saw through all these people. He did not know how essentially he was united to them.

It was, then, with a boyish trepidation that, on a sudden day of sunshine, he entered the office of the steamship company, found a long line of

people there, and was abruptly told by an annoyed clerk that all ships were full until the 5th of June.

"An' all I can give you then is 'n inside stateroom. But it's a single one, anyhow, an' it'll cost yuh two hundred and sixty-seven ninety. Want it? I'll have to wire for 't right away."

John agreed. He went to the office and told Hooker, who asked him whether he had applied for a passport. There was no great hurry, but it had better not be left to the last moment. Hooker assumed the superior air of a much-traveled man.

"I haven't been across since before the war. I am told that Europe is greatly changed. No"—this with a touch of condescension—"I've never been in Rome. But Paris! You must see Paris. Most charming city in the world." He came as near winking as was possible to him. "A very gay city and"—he recovered himself— "full of literary associations. The very place to work, I should say. Not for you, you think? Well, there is a distinctly classical touch in your stuff. You may be right."

From that moment on, the days and weeks began to race. There was some shopping to be done. At least Mrs. Austin said so and John didn't have the heart to rob his mother of the pleasure. He

didn't see why he should have an entirely new outfit from steamer trunk to shaving set and from hats to socks. He wasn't going on an ordinary pleasure trip. But his mother assured him that she had heard from ever so many friends that a man could not get anything suitable on the Continent and insisted that he provide himself.

An intermittent whirl set in. The days afterward seemed very curious ones to John Austin—days full of small agitations that alternated with hours of almost empty brooding. He tried hard to go over all the small things that he had written, to get an objective view of his large, tentative plans and outlines. He could do neither. The shell of his old and still present life was already broken. He was no longer at the center of it. He could do nothing but pack his manuscripts. He was, psychically, in mid-air and had no peace at all until he was on the train that bore him to New York and felt that freedom which comes from all travel when one is released from definite place and definite time and thus from those responsibilities that are the creatures of place and time and the resultant circumstance.

Although he stopped at the McAlpin as usual, New York gave him a new exhilaration, since, for

the first time, it was to him now a harbor city from which one could set sail to Singapore or Stockholm, to Constantinople or Canton. And he was glad of this exhilaration, since it left him the moment he stepped on the ship that was to take him to Genoa. For almost in that first moment there came to him a sense of the discomfort and contemptuousness with which his eight days at sea were to fill him.

He proved to be a good sailor on that gentle summer ocean. What he disliked was the human scene about him. The passengers were middle-class Americans with a sprinkling of Canadians. These people who at home were probably not below the average of humanity in either brains or manners spent their time here in staging a little imitation of what they would have called "society" in its most disgusting aspects. Several of them had evidently made the trip on this ship before. They —ultimate glory—knew the captain and sat at his table and fawned upon that fat and common individual. Others, who lacked this envied advantage, formed little groups whose only purpose was the feeling of exclusiveness that their members enjoyed. There were conferences and secrets and special meetings in the smoking room and it was quite clear to John Austin that here was, in ob-

vious and ugly miniature, an image of that world in which people live by a feeling of superiority which they never dream of earning or deserving. Since there were more or less unattached young women on board, he supposed that he could, by a slight enough effort, have either slipped into one of the existing groups or have helped to gather some of the stragglers and outcasts into a cohesion of their own from which they at least—for he stood in no such need—could have drawn the gayety and assurance of gregariousness. He preferred his isolation; he preferred to watch with more and more of amused tolerance the play of the pygmy forces about him that symbolized so strikingly the bitter and futile strivings of the larger world of action that lay behind and before the ship.

He preferred to watch the sea, which was, during nearly the whole voyage, like crinkled silk. If waves came they were long and soft. Only on a single day the water darkened and the waves were shorter and fiercer and thumped with small sharp thumps against the sides of the ship. Spray flew; the sky was of the soft whitish gray of wool. That day gave John Austin an autumnal feeling with its presage of decay, of abdication, of tragedy.

He was relieved when the sun flooded the world again; his heart almost stopped for a moment when the sea quieted and the ship began to float and floated into harbor and there arose before him, like an amphitheater of pink and mauve and amethyst and green, the city of Genoa.

It was our young man's good fortune that he had always disliked books of travel and description. He himself, though he took no credit therefor, had a very seeing eye. He disliked the faintness of reports at secondhand; he was annoyed by the blurred visions which such reports evoke. His sight needed no purging now from the half-effaced impressions of a vicarious memory. The magic of the Mediterranean world came to him fresh, clear, unspoiled. He saw a hill sloping in a curve no hill that he had ever seen had had; he saw a palm, smooth-stemmed, broad-crowned; he saw a wall with plaster grown iridescent—a windowless wall built to give shade from the unconquerable light; he saw a golden column against the lapis sky. His heart stirred warm and quick like a bird held in one's hand. He understood all his old reachings-out after form; he understood the shape of Horace's Alcaic verses and the closing stanzas of Matthew Arnold's "Scholar Gypsy"

and the prose of Landor. It almost seemed to him at that moment that he wanted no more, needed no more than these few things that filled his eye. He was afraid of the confusion that an excess of seeing would bring, afraid that he would not be able to recapture in all its sovereign lucidity the meaning of that dawnlike moment.

Feet scurried on the deck behind him. He had to look after his luggage and to join the line of passengers that was being filtered to the pier. He had to clamber into a cab and drive to the hotel which had been recommended to him. He saw palaces and monuments and churches. But all these things slipped by, a vision that was for the moment dulled. His mind tried to hold fast that first wonder of sight and insight. He closed his eyes in the cab. He found the hotel conventional and a trifle shabby, but knew that he had been a bit anxious when he found himself relieved by the fluent English of the *portier*. He could not at this hour have summoned his ten words of Italian to save his life.

He had no impulse to open so much as a hand bag. He knew, of course, that Genoa, despite her glory as the birthplace of Columbus and the splendor of her palaces, was largely a commercial

and a harbor city and bore no visible traces of an antique tradition. He wanted magnificently to multiply and to intensify that first impression of his. He wanted not to loiter, but to hurry on to Rome. He went downstairs and found, upon inquiry at the *portier's* desk, that the only sensible train for him to take left early in the morning. Luckily the afternoon was drawing on toward evening. More to while away the hours than from desire, he drove about the city for a little. His cabby mentioned the names of palaces—Palazzo Balbi-Senárega, Palazzo Rosso, other names—and John Austin saw rich façades and marble columns and caught one glimpse of oranges nestled in dark foliage. But for all the indisputable beauty of what he saw he still felt that it was cluttering and muddying and overlaying what he had seen sailing in at noon and had a moment of brief delight only at sight of the palms about the Columbus monument.

Morning came after a heavy, restless night, and John Austin found himself in the train beside the window of his compartment, eager with a hushed and almost breathless eagerness. For a few hours his unpracticed eye found it hard to differentiate this countryside from others he had seen. Then

gradually—his topography was vague—other notes crept into the landscape. From afar he saw a hill, a hill with a long, soft slope, and upon that slope, stopping just short of the rounded peak, there stood a row of cypresses. The train rattled on. He saw ruined arches in hillsides, arches not very lofty, but serene and majestic even in their decay. He saw vineyards. He saw a terraced hill with gnarled, contorted olive trees, their little silvery leaves quick with a twinkling motion in the wind. He saw a field of wheat, and the wheat seemed to him more golden than any he had ever seen because it was dotted with the innumerable flowers of the scarlet poppy. This gold and scarlet and a broken arch and a sudden slender cypress brought back to him the clearness of his first vision. Again he tried to hold it fast. Then, as the hours wore on, he grew a little weary and was scarcely stirred by the name of Florence. But the Tuscan hills soothed him. He would not, he thought now, lose the vision he desired again. He got up and stood in the passageway outside his compartment and through the larger window saw, as the sun faded, the hill towns—saw Orvieto, and a little later Viterbo sunk into the mountain side,

growing out of the rock, rocklike, sinister yet calm, cruel, eternal, huddled yet magnificent.

Rome was drawing nearer and nearer. Rome. He stood a trifle tense and could not help hearing from the compartment next to his own a nasal, somewhat didactic, somewhat querulous and boastful voice. How well he knew the precise quality of that voice. He listened hard, although it seemed to him that he had always known these words, could always have foretold them.

"W'y, look here," the voice said, "I been all over. Yeh, stopped in Venice for three days. Everybody said, y'know, how wonderful the canals are. Well, I want to tell yuh that they smell bad. That's all the wonderfulness I could see. W'y, we wouldn't stand for such dirt and for such unsanitary conditions in Chicago—no, not for a minute, we wouldn't. We c'n put it all over this country. Sure, history's all right an' art, an' I don't pretend to know. But seems to me that decent living conditions ain't to be sneezed at. Oh yes, I'm goin' on to Rome. Might's well now. An' I don't doubt but w'at it's interestin'. But for a place to live in—gimme Chicago every time. Yes, sir."

John Austin laughed to himself. He chuckled.

He didn't really resent the breaking of the spell under which he had been. The voice made him think of the Earnharts. He wondered about them and their affairs. But suddenly his heart fluttered again as it had done when the ship had sailed into harbor. Lights twinkled in the dusk. The train moved more slowly. Some one who had stopped beside him at the window, a tall, dark man, turned to him and pointed with a graceful gesture and said, "Roma."

VI

A TREE gives shade beside a small baroque wall fountain in the Via Bocca di Leone. Above the fountain the wall is built of a row of short columns and one has glimpses of trees and of nondescript statuary in a courtyard beyond. The little street is narrow, but because there is no sidewalk it has, at this point, a momentary spaciousness. It has the effect, in truth, of the tiniest of squares and a couple of cabs will be seen loitering in front of the Hotel Inghilterra which adjoins the wall with the fountain. Usually the street is quiet. But several times a day and even after nightfall an automobile will whir into it and blow its horn. And the Roman auto horns are of a coarse and vicious dissonance.

The Hotel Inghilterra and the wall beside it are set back a little, which gives the street its moment's spaciousness. To the right, throughout the rest of its few hundred paces that end at the Via Frattina, it is very narrow and dotted by half-sordid little shops. This narrowing begins at a

corner, the corner of the Via Borgognona, which, even narrower than the Via Bocca di Leone, cuts through the latter to the right of the hotel and brings you, if you follow it for but a minute, to the Piazza di Spagna. Here, if you are minded to look at them, are handsome shops. But better is the fountain in the middle of the square. And better still it is to stand in the inclosure of the fountain and look at the Spanish stairs that climb up a hill and at the church that crowns the hill. For the square and the fountain and the marble stairs have the ordered dignity and measured beauty of the eighteenth century which pleases some minds better in the long run than either the glow of the renaissance or the florid excess of baroque.

What is more important for our purpose than such considerations is the fact that on the corner of the Via Bocca di Leone and the Via Borgognona, separated from the Inghilterra by but the few yards' width of the latter, is a shop full of second-hand books, with a show window opening on either street. And both of these windows, but especially the one that is turned to the hotel, are filled with sedate rows of books, Latin books and Italian books, in half-calf and pigskin, which seem

through the very panes that separate them from you to give off the musty odor that is agreeable to the lettered mind.

I say that the bookshop is more important for our purpose than any discussion of the styles of architecture or sculpture. For our story is the story of what happened to John Austin in Rome. And John Austin's culture, like that of practically all Americans, was necessarily almost wholly literary in character. To the end of his stay in Rome he couldn't have told you with assurance what style or precise period of architecture was represented by the Fountain of Trevi. But one is not to suppose that he didn't have his own quite deep perceptions. He came to admire the fountain, came even—as we shall see—to love it. But if he had ever found himself writing a page of prose in a manner analogous to the stylistic manner of the fountain he would have tingled with a certain shame and torn up the page at once.

What, at all events, caught his eye as, on his first morning, he came out of the hotel into the street was the window of the bookshop. He stood by the window and was tempted to round the corner and go in. But, in the first place, he wasn't sure that the shopkeeper could speak English and,

in the second place, he had determined that his *tempo*, so to speak, mustn't be that of a tourist. He had been reading his Baedeker in bed before going to sleep and again before getting up that morning. He could easily imagine the *tempo* and the state of mind of the average American tourist who rushed from place to place in order to have been there, who looked at ruins and buildings and paintings in order to have seen them. For himself, he had come here to catch something like a "spark from heaven," as one of his favorite poets said, and so he had better cultivate, in the words of another, a "wise passiveness."

He turned from the window and surveyed the street. His eye caught the blue-coated, gold-tressed *portier* of the hotel in the doorway. At once that functionary had persuasive eyes. Despite himself, John Austin strolled in the man's direction.

"Is there anything we can do for you, sir?"

John smiled and shook his head.

"Cab, sir?"

"No, no."

"If you go right here at the corner through the Via Borgognona you come to the Piazza di Spagna and straight across the street you find the Ameri-

can Express Company. They arrange very fine trips through Rome and the environs. Shall I send a boy with you, sir?"

"No."

John frowned. Yet he felt a little embarrassed at the sullenness of his tone. The man couldn't be supposed to know what moods and visions *he* was after. So he added:

"Thanks. I'll find my way."

He was now committed to it and walked into the Via Borgognona at a businesslike pace. Out of sight of the hotel he began to loiter. He laughed to himself. What a curious tangle of cheap compulsions one was in! The *portier* expected him to start on the business of sight-seeing with efficiency and vigor. So he pretended to start. He must keep out of sight of the hotel. But he liked his street and he liked that shop and he was in no hurry. Perhaps he would move, anyhow. The hotel seemed to be full of people.

He stopped in front of a little *trattoria,* the first he had seen. Early as it was, a few men were sitting on the street under a red-and-white awning, drinking, as the sign above told you, the wine of Frascati. He was tempted to sit down, too. But he was afraid to imagine what effect wine soon

after breakfast would have on him. No, that wouldn't do. So he went on, and in a moment was on the Piazza di Spagna and looked across the fountain at the stairs and at the flower sellers with their brilliant baskets, and stopped to fill his eye.

It wasn't so easy. Here there was a lively traffic of motor cars blowing their abominable horns and trolley cars screeched and thundered. It wasn't a favorable spot for cultivating a contemplative attitude. John, moreover, saw the dark, serviceable eye of a young Italian fixed on him who evidently thought the *straniero* in a dilemma and wanted to offer help. Instinctively our young man squared his shoulders, assumed briskness, made his way through the rather confusing traffic across the street, and walked into the offices of the American Express Company. It was just as well, he told himself. He probably needed more money. He cashed a check, was asked if he wanted tickets for a sight-seeing tour, refused curtly, and found himself, rather irritated and a bit helpless, out in the magnificent sunshine, looking at the Madonna on her tall column.

The thing for him to do was, of course, to take a room in some quiet place. But that would have to come later. He must learn a little more Italian

first. Moreover, the *portier* had told him that the people who crowded the hotel belonged to a party of Irish pilgrims and would soon leave. Perhaps he could then accustom the *portier* and the latter's importunate assistants to his own unusual and vagrant ways.

These sensible reflections comforted John Austin very little. He recrossed the street and wandered along, looking at the shop windows. Life was curiously rigid or he curiously inflexible. Was it a choice between systematic sight-seeing and uneasy inaction? He had dreamed of the matter differently. He had had, at home, a vision of crooked and beautiful streets which would suck him in, carry him along, down which he would follow a stream of gay and comely people. He had expected an ease and suavity and sweetness of life. What he found, so far at least—he mustn't judge yet, of course—was a stiff modern city, modern and stiff despite the quaintness of individual streets, particularly noisy and glaring.

He had, in his circular wandering about the Piazza, returned to the foot of the Spanish stairs. They seemed remarkably lofty and beautiful to him now. He could easily imagine how exquisite, in his special sense, the scene had been in the earlier

eighteenth century when the steps had been built and had looked down into a very quiet square. And it occurred to him suddenly and sickeningly that what he was looking for was perhaps not another country at all, but another age. He gave himself a little shake and walked on and found himself suddenly and to his own immeasurable and disgusting relief face to face with the Brawleys of Columbus.

Professor Brawley, however, had his old manly sincerity. The half-clerical exterior seemed to melt into humanness.

"Well, Austin, we heard you'd gone abroad. But we didn't know you were here."

"Just got here last night."

"How lovely!" Esmeralda Brawley piped. Mrs. Austin always called her Esmeralda. That was enough. "Oh, how perfectly lovely! Though you do run into friends everywhere. In Carlsbad we met the Wagenbauers. You should see dear Jessie. You should ——"

Brawley laughed.

"Come now, Jack Austin isn't interested in Jessie Wagenbauer."

Mrs. Brawley's large, fat yet somehow not inelegant face didn't lose its smile. She was accus-

tomed to these little rebuffs from her philosophical husband, of whom she was ignorantly but sincerely proud. As Mrs. Austin used to say, there was no harm in Esmeralda. She was a fool, but not an interfering fool, and Dick Brawley, who really had a fine mind, might have done a whole lot worse.

"Tell us," Brawley said, "how long are you staying?"

John Austin felt warmed all through.

"I don't know exactly. My plan was to stay here for weeks or even months and steep myself into the place and do some work. But the first impression of Rome—it's the very first, of course —has somehow—well, I don't know. I won't say put a wet blanket on my plan, but ——"

"Let's get out of this sun," said Brawley, thoughtfully.

"Be careful, Dick! This crossing is dreadful!"

They moved slowly. Brawley stopped for a moment in front of the column with the Madonna. He laughed his agreeable and interesting laugh.

"Old Pio Nono had this thing put up to commemorate the official acceptance of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Over there on the square used to be the Roman swine market and the

fountain—you noticed it's in the shape of a barge —corking thing—is by Bernini. History in the streets."

They had reached the shade.

"We had an early breakfast," Brawley went on. "Can't we go somewhere, Esmeralda, and have a *café noir* or something? I'd like to talk to Austin. Have you got anything on?"

"No, Dick, no. Only I do wish they had a lovely place here like Florian's in Venice. Don't you love Florian's, Mr. Austin, and St. Mark's and the dear doves?"

"I haven't been in Venice," John said.

Brawley's gentle amusement at his wife was, of course, his defense of her kindly but incoherent babble both against himself and against others.

"We can't bring Venice here for your benefit, my dear. You'll have to put up with Rome."

He summoned a cab and they drove to the Piazza Colonna, and took a table in the arcade of the Café Biffi.

"You've been in Rome before, Doctor Brawley?" John asked.

"Eight or nine times. I rather went in for classical philology before I switched over to

philosophy. Damned good thing, too. It's still the proper foundation for everything. I know just how you feel about Rome. The modern city gets less attractive every year. You've got to look and look hard for what you want. Modern Rome, contemporary Rome, hasn't got any more atmosphere than Columbus, Ohio. Luckily all the older *strata* can be found."

"I think our hotel is charming. We're stopping at the Hotel de Russie, Mr. Austin."

Brawley laughed. "Don't brag, Esmeralda dear. It is a lovely place." He turned to Austin. "We oughtn't to stay there, you know. It's very expensive. Where are you?"

John explained.

"Very nice," Brawley said. "Very convenient. I know the place. Well, what I wanted to say is this: I know how you feel, exactly. Do this: take ancient Rome and devote yourself to that for a while. Start with the Forum and the Palatine, say. Go every day. Let things drop into place; form a pattern, don't you know? The pattern's there. It'll come to you. If you get fed up drive to the Cimitero Inglese and sort of moon around. Don't just look at the graves of Shelley and Keats and

rush out. The place is a record, a quiet and lovely record, of what Rome has meant to people. I always get a good deal out of it, though Esmeralda says it's lugubrious."

John Austin nodded. "I'll do that. I'll just soak for a while—quietly."

The two men fell silent and watched the crowd. Mrs. Brawley fumbled in her beaded bag. Suddenly she gave a little shriek.

"Dick, we promised to meet the Principessa Rutuoli on the terrace at twelve sharp. How could you forget?"

Brawley put his hand to his very high forehead from which the hair was receding. This time his voice was weary.

"I didn't forget, Esmeralda. I hoped you might." He turned to John. "A princess is a treat for my wife, you see. As a matter of fact, the princess came originally from Youngstown, Ohio. However ——" He got up with a little groan. "You can walk right along the Corso Umberto here, Austin, toward your hotel. We're farther away and have to take a cab. Thank God, they're cheap."

"You must come and take tea with us, Mr. Austin. Won't you?"

"You must," Brawley added, heartily. "You really must. We'll be here another ten days, at least."

They got into a cab on the curb and left John Austin overwhelmed by an unexpected forlornness.

VII

IT CANNOT be said that John Austin recaptured in the weeks that followed the glow and lift of his first sight of the Italian shore. Gradually the Irish pilgrims who had thronged the hotel disappeared; the Via Bocca di Leone grew to be a very quiet place; the *portier* and his men ceased to be either inquisitive or formidable. John managed to get a table at which he could write brought into his meager room. But all his writing consisted of desultory notes of what he saw. And even these notes seemed to him to have neither sting nor freshness. But how could they have either? Rome had been celebrated through the ages by many men in many strains. Our young man had but to think of certain matchless stanzas of Shelley to fall utterly silent concerning the city in which he walked about.

It didn't, of course, matter. He told himself that over and over again. He hadn't come to write about Rome. He had come to live, and hence to write, *in* Rome. He had come to draw for his own

purposes from deep and inexhaustible sources here. Here where the spirit of man had dwelt so long and brooded so deeply and transcended all vicissitudes by leaving beauty as its only ultimate memorial—here was the spot where, in this afternoon of time, beauty might touch the lips of even the most alien pilgrim from a Western shore.

He followed Brawley's advice. He learned to find his own way to the Forum. He disliked the narrow, modern, busy Corso Umberto. He disliked even more, without knowing why, the huge, white architectural monument of Vittorio Emanuele with its golden statues so arrogant and fresh in the intense sun. But he loved to leave that gleaming pile behind him and saunter into the narrow, dirty streets and lanes that led to the Forum. He often wandered about here, up and down the crooked Foro Italico; he once came upon an alley the name of which touched him: Vicolo delle Botteghe oscure—the corner of the dark shops. He thought there was a great sweetness and humility in that name and an innocence of brashness and bustle and good business. And he wondered whether a quietude in the face of life like the quietude of the people who had named this street were not among the qualities which you

could not cultivate in America, but which might come to you here unasked. This idea took hold of him. He wrote a sonnet about it one night. But next morning the sonnet went into the waste-paper basket. It wasn't a bad sonnet. But there were thousands like it in English literature already—literally thousands.

He went back to the Forum again and again. At first he had the impression of an ill-kept garden, an old garden full of ruins and rubble. And he had somehow imagined the place to be less fragmentary than it was. He had evidently been influenced by pictures of restorations. Gradually, as he got to know it better and better, it began to seem less broken. Coming in, he could lose himself for many minutes in the columns of the temple to Antonine and Faustina and would succeed in forgetting the church which had been thrust into the ruins behind the columns. He stood here on the Via Sacra. Here, one day, Horace had met an affected and boresome fool and had had a hard time getting rid of him. But along this way, too, had gone the pontifex with the silent Vestal Virgin to the Capitol. And Horace had said that his verses would last as long as this ceremony. He had meant forever. The pontifex was gone and

the house of the Vestal Virgins was marked only by a marble pool and a few weather-beaten statues. The verses remained.

From the Via Sacra John Austin would stroll over past the few rude stones that are the only memorial of Cæsar and stand among the poppies beside a crumbling wall in front of what remains of the Temple of Castor and Pollux. To the left arose the gaunt, stripped arches of the once golden houses of the emperors. But he looked up at those three columns which are not so tall and yet seem so lofty. The clouds floated above them in the blue sky, floated swiftly, and John Austin had the visual illusion that it was not the clouds that moved, but the façade of the temple that swayed toward him.

But his favorite station was not within the Forum proper at all. Instead of entering by the gate of visitors, he would walk through a short, shabby street to the Capitoline Hill and there survey that garden of ruins. To his left rose the perfect and intricate arch of Septimius Severus; to the right the façade of the immemorial Temple of Saturn. He looked up at its portico and read the words, "Senatus Populusque Romanus." And the reading of these words now gave a dreamlike

quality to his vision. As in a preternaturally clear dream he now gazed across stones and columns to where beyond the house of the Vestals, beyond the great arches of the Basilica of Constantine, at the end of the Via Sacra, rises the Arch of Titus. Here, in his absorption, he would stand quite still for many minutes; he drew the scene into himself; he became one with it. He would have been hard put to it to explain precisely in what consisted the immense satisfaction of this mere act of seeing. Doubtless there entered into it all the glow of the historic imagination and all the ineffable tragedy of the passing of things mighty and things beautiful which their human makers had thought eternal. But there was an element which these explanations did not cover, and once, at least, this visionary absorption had a strange result which did not reveal all of its meaning to John Austin until many weeks had passed.

He had been looking at the Forum from his favorite station on the Capitoline Hill. He did not know how long he had stood there. But he felt a slight chill which often, even after the warmest summer days, will steal at sunset into the air of Rome. He shivered perceptibly and at the same moment there arose in him a faint revulsion against

all that he had been seeing—against the faultless loveliness which the patina of time had given to every column and to every stone, the perfect blue of the sky, the perfect crimson of the poppies, the perfect swaying of the oleander bushes, the perfect circling of a swallow in the sky.

He turned away and closed his eyes, and with closed eyes saw a scene which he did not remember ever to have beheld. It was a grimy freight yard on the ragged edge of an American city. A dozen tracks ran side by side. Between the blackened ties lay lumps of soft coal. Here and there stood empty, gaping freight cars. Under the freight cars lay sheets and wads of dirty newspaper and empty cans on which the labels still showed the garish pictures of dead-looking meats or unnaturally red tomatoes. Up an embankment, torn and rough, with verdure pale and wilted from soft-coal smoke and flying cinders, climbed two small, freckled, barefoot boys. They got to the top and ran up to a broad, tired-looking, shapeless woman in a gingham apron who had been beckoning to them and together the three entered a frame house, bare, hideous, inhospitable looking.

John Austin opened his eyes suddenly. He remembered what he had heard of Roman fever.

The chill still clung to him, in fact. He walked briskly back through the Via Bonella and on the Via Cavour caught a cab. Back in his room at the Hotel Inghilterra he ordered a cognac, drank it down, and threw himself on his bed.

He felt better at once—quite normal, in fact. He came to the conclusion that too much solitariness was bad for the nerves. He had better call on the Brawleys, who were prolonging their stay, and have Brawley give him some letters to a few people in Rome. In addition, he had better go more definitely at some piece of work. He had sketched a one-act play in verse on a possible incident in the life of the poet Catullus. That dissolute lady of the Clodian house whom Catullus had immortalized as Lesbia might easily have tempted some dear friend of Catullus to be one of her lovers. It might have been that fellow poet Cæcilius for whom Catullus entertained so deep a friendship. And what, under such circumstances, was Catullus to do between the natural bitterness of his jealousy and his exact knowledge of Lesbia's habitual unfaithfulness? Since she was unfaithful, did it matter that it was Cæcilius? John Austin thought he saw a good one-act play in this struggle of motives and passions. The scene was

to be the Clodian palace; the medium verse. Yet he thought he could give his little piece an effective climax and a surprising curtain.

Good. After dinner he would go to work in earnest sketching in the contents of each scene. At the moment he was hungry. He would not dress particularly; he would eat downstairs in the hotel. He would go to work.

There were only a few people in the dim dining room with its ugly imitation columns. The waiter brought antipasti and John enjoyed the sausage and tomatoes and the porous Italian bread. He drank no wine, since he wanted to keep his brain unclouded for his evening's work.

He had finished and was waiting for his soup when a woman suddenly and softly emerged from behind him and took her seat at a table by the window immediately in front of him. She had on a one-piece frock of blue silk that had remarkably long and graceful lines. It had a V-shaped opening at the throat, and the simple sleeves, he noticed at once, had delicate rings of embroidery at the wrist. He supposed he noticed this on account of the hands, which were pale and long, though not morbidly narrow, and which, for the moment, the woman had laid with a gesture of singular quietude

upon the table before her. There was a ring upon her left hand only. It was of pale old gold twisted into a design that he had never seen before.

Of this much he was certain. Less so of the character of the head which she kept turned away from him to the window. What he did see was dark-brown hair, very heavy, very simply coiled. A mere glimpse of profile showed a rather high cheek bone, the curve of a full, red lip that contrasted strongly with the golden-tinged pallor of the face. But even as John was watching the waiter came. The lady turned her head, and quite by accident her eyes, which were a dark bronze color, met his own.

The eyes were quiet, but had something intrepid in their gaze. The whole face had a quietude that seemed to come from within, and yet an extraordinary aliveness, too. John Austin felt quite sure that he had never before seen a comparable expression in a woman's face. There was no eagerness in this face and there was no vanity. And he knew suddenly that he had never yet seen a woman's face that did not either reveal or quite as obviously conceal both eagerness and vanity. Nor was this lady a bobbed-haired intellectual such as he had once or twice seen at Greenwich Village

parties in New York. He knew enough to appreciate the fact that her gown had the simplicity that is rare and therefore dear.

She spoke to the waiter in a deep and slightly husky voice in fluent Italian. Was she an Italian? Then how did she come to stop at this hotel? But she did not, somehow, look Italian, though John would have found it hard enough to tell why not. She had no touch of languor; yet she was not taut as so many Englishwomen seem to be. She had not the mobility of a Frenchwoman; her lack of eagerness assured him that she was not American. He was no surer of her age than of her nationality. She could not have been over thirty. Her skin was girlish in the fineness of its texture. When she turned her head her throat remained lovely. Yet neither her quietude nor her seriousness was that of a girl.

To his own amazement, John Austin found himself forgetting his food. Heavens! he must not stare so rudely. But his eyes sought her against his will. They sought especially those marvelous pale hands. With one of them she now supported her chin for a minute. The sleeve fell back a little, and below a wrist as delicate as it was strong there

was a plain bracelet of the same old gold with the same unknown symbol as the single ring she wore.

A shiver stole down John Austin's back, a remnant, no doubt, of the feverish discomfort he had felt in the afternoon. At that moment the head waiter came up to the strange lady and spoke to her. John could not help hearing. It was English, of all things.

"We can get you the other room, madame."

She smiled for the first time. It was a strange, rather sad smile. Yet though it was sad it was not joyless. John Austin clasped his hands under the table.

"That's very nice of you," he heard her say. Oh yes, she had an accent. A little rustle went through her English—a little rustle as of reeds. She nodded to the head waiter. Then she arose. No, she wasn't really tall. But she had the effect of tallness. She didn't glance at John and he knew perfectly that this was conscious on her part. But it wasn't a rebuke for his staring. It was rather a desire to make him feel that she hadn't noticed it, that, therefore, he needn't feel uncomfortable on account of his possible rudeness.

She went out of the dining hall and her walk was rhythmic. But it was—rarest of things, espe-

cially in a woman—a walk unconscious of itself. John looked after her. He had half swung around on his chair to do so. He found the ironic eye of a waiter on him. She was gone. Something in him seemed to collapse, to weaken. Good Lord! what a queer day he was having!

He didn't want, somehow, to take the elevator. He walked slowly up the stairs to his room. There flashed into his mind the hill and palm and wall of his Genoa landing and the temple of Castor and Pollux seeming to sway toward him under the blue sky. He reached his room and sat down at his table to work. But he could not visualize nor deal with either the sensuous and splendid Lesbia nor the hollow-eyed poet whom she betrayed. He saw the bronze of those eyes, the curve of that throat, that pallid hand with its strange ring.

VIII

LOVE at first sight is not so violent a thing as the poets feign. Had John Austin never seen the lady with the pallid hands and the bronze glint in her eyes again, the memory of her would have been that of a lovely but slowly fading picture in his mind. The thorn does not at once enter the heart. All that he knew on that night of his first vision of her was that the image of her gently interposed itself between him and the white page before his eyes. He knew, too, that a gentle sense of well-being was in him. Not until he awoke for a brief period in the middle of the night did it occur to him to wonder whether she was staying, whether he would see her again. Then he felt his first perceptible pang. But it was momentary. His brain had not quite cleared of sleep. When morning came he seemed to have a dim memory of having dreamed of her. But he could not be sure.

The strong sunlight streamed in through the half-open shutters. And with it a fear stole into his mind. A vague fear. He did not formulate

its character even to himself. But he hurried his preparations; he ran down the stairs, entered the dining room with a flush of hope which immediately died into a gray blankness and a curious, childlike desire on his part to go home.

The food nauseated him; the waiter irritated him. He had made a certain plan for the day. It seemed trivial, absurd, flat. He called himself a fool. The fact, of course, which leads even sensible people to read cheap novels and commit other absurdities, is that the interest of the sexes in each other furnishes an elation and excitement so powerful that at the touch of that excitement all other interests, plans, dreams, ambitions, tastes, and even passions fade into staleness and insignificance. A commonplace. Of course, but a consciously unacknowledged one, especially among nice Americans. John Austin's inbred psychical habits would not let him admit his condition to himself. He was in Rome. The ages were looking down on him. He was a poet. These things no longer mattered to him in comparison with a dark eye and a pallid hand. The scale of values he accepted would not let him recognize the inevitableness of the event.

He passed through the hall, picked up his hat and cane, and went out into the street. All his

normal impulses were in abeyance. He could not linger here. Yet he was afraid to go. He wanted to ask the *portier* after the lady and hadn't any idea of how to frame the question. Life had not prepared him for such a step. Theoretically he knew that a Continental of a certain type would have had no difficulty in establishing a perfectly seemly understanding with the *portier* in a matter of this kind. Well, he couldn't. Columbus offered no training of that kind.

He had an idea. He wanted to stay in the neighborhood. How would it be if he finally went into the bookshop and tried his luck? He had kept putting it off and off. The *portier* had told him that the keeper of the shop spoke only French and Italian. John doubted whether he had Italian enough for his purpose. Of his muddled remains of college French he was ashamed.

But to-day he had a motive that overrode these hesitations. He had, somehow, to stay near the hotel. He could not tear himself away. Even as he walked toward the shop he glanced behind him. He wanted, if possible, to see her again, to fix her image more firmly in his mind. For more he did not hope. He found, moreover, that he was keeping in psychical reserve a little mechanism

of resignation to use the minute he discovered that even this humble hope would be frustrated. He would not admit to himself how significant this mechanism and its readiness were of the depth of the impression that had been made on him.

He peered instinctively through the glass door of the shop. His hand that was on the knob shook. Inside he saw a blue outline. Somehow he managed to open the door and saw her bending over a table of books and pamphlets. She had a little hat on now that matched her costume—not the mushroom in vogue, but a grave adorable little hat with rim turned up slightly on the left side.

John Austin stood inside now, quite helpless for the moment. He saw the shopkeeper, a dusty, scholarly-looking, thick man with a gray beard come up to him and mutter something that sounded at that moment like an incantation. John pulled himself together violently. He felt himself blushing. It was too absurd. He translated his American request with gross literalness. Every syllable was shame and agony.

"Je voudrais voir des éditions des poètes latins."

The shopkeeper began to talk, and vaguely John knew that the man was speaking French.

But this rapid and Italianate French was hopelessly beyond him. He must have looked rather helpless and absurd, for the head in the adorable little hat turned suddenly. He saw that smile with its tinge of sadness and heard that slightly husky voice.

"May I help?"

Again that accent like the rustle of wind in the reeds of a river.

John heard himself lapsing into the vocabulary of his boyhood.

"It's mighty good of you."

She nodded gravely now. "The Romans are not linguists," she said. "It is different in the north of Italy."

"Well," he said, "I've been studying Italian. But it's a slow process."

Again she nodded. "You want fine old editions?"

"Not particularly. Nothing very expensive. I—I like Latin poetry and I want, say, a Horace and a Catullus and maybe a Martial. Just as souvenirs."

She spoke in rapid Italian to the shopkeeper, who produced small pigskin volumes of a date and at a reasonableness of price that staggered John.

He got a pleasant little Horace printed at Venice in 1657, a charming Martial of 1534, and a most elegant Catullus of the middle of the eighteenth century, and paid less than a hundred lire for all three. He could not conceal his delight.

"Why, it's marvelous!"

She smiled. "You are a savant?"

He laughed. "Me? No. I'm a newspaper man with a taste for poetry. That's all. And I can't tell you how grateful I am to you."

She looked at him, he thought, with a kindness which, though it was reserved, was not aloof. He was afraid she would go or, having given her help, turn definitely from him. He so wanted her to stay. He found himself, out of the depth of his very timidity and nervous fear, suddenly beyond the bounds of decorum. He found himself talking to the strange lady. He told her of his dissatisfaction with his work, his weariness of America, his having come to Rome to write. He stopped suddenly. He had caught, as it were, the sound of his own voice and become aware of the inexcusableness of his sudden confessions. But looking at her, he saw at once that his talk didn't strike her as inexcusable at all, that she didn't think in terms of superficial social decorum at all, that she was

pondering what he had told her. And he was jubilantly certain of that when she spoke.

"It's strange. You strike me as so very American. You don't mind my saying that, do you?"

"Not a bit. Have you been in America?"

He was amazed at his own boldness. But again he saw that she didn't think it boldness.

"No," she said. "In England, yes. Never in America. It must be a wonderful country."

She moved toward the door and he moved with her. And it seemed the most natural thing to open the door for her, the most natural and the most thrilling. By a common consent they turned slowly to the left. He walked beside her and every now and then her elbow brushed his own ever so lightly.

"It is a wonderful country, I suppose." He thought, and her presence, her look, gave his thoughts glow and pertinence. "But there are so many Americas. There is mine, and I'm dead tired of it. There's another into which I can't get or won't get. Or ——" He stopped. "It's confoundedly complicated."

She smiled that smile which, though so unaffected, so simple, was, he knew now, the smile

of some tragic Muse, a smile for which men might be willing to die.

"That," she said, "is so American, that you are amazed because life is complicated."

They had reached the door of the hotel. John Austin found himself trembling slightly all over. Desperation made him bold.

"Don't go," he said. "May I introduce myself?"

"Why not?"

He told her his name and the name of his state and city. He saw her restrain an impulse to smile. Then, quite gravely, she said:

"My name is Esther Azancot."

He bowed. He wondered what sort of a name it was. But his daring had limits. This mutual introduction, moreover, had somehow had the effect of stopping their free communicativeness. Both fell silent, although they strolled on together, turned the corner where the flower seller sat amid her great bold blossoms, and wandered on toward the Piazza di Spagna. The sidewalk was narrow, and whenever anyone came in the direction opposite to them John fell behind and saw the gold tinge under the pallor of her neck and

the droop of her dark hair. He caught the faint ghost of a perfume from her that seemed to him like a bodiless blending of cinnamon and sandalwood. But it was so faint that he almost thought it existed only in his imagination. Amid the traffic of the Piazza he half touched her elbow and found himself trembling a little again and desisted. They stopped in front of the Spanish stairs. She turned to him.

"Some time I should like you to tell me about those different Americas."

"Would you really?"

He knew at that moment that he could talk well to her, better than he had ever talked in his life. He gasped a little.

"Would you think it awfully cheeky if I asked whether we mightn't dine together?"

She looked at him gravely. "I've been dining at Ranieri's. It is around the corner in the Via Mario de' Fiori. I'm usually there at half after seven. Now I must get a cab at the corner."

He walked with her toward the row of cabs.

"It's awfully kind of you. I'll be there."

She did not reply. There was a coolness between them suddenly. She entered the cab and

gave the cabby a direction which John did not understand. He did not dare put out his hand. She nodded at him without smiling and the cabby touched his horse with his whip.

He stood there staring stupidly at the disappearing cab. He felt a sickish and forlorn feeling, then a stab somewhere under his chest. The sun seemed intolerably glaring. Good heavens! where was she going? Who was she? He didn't even know, it came to him, whether she was married. He told himself, of course, that it was none of his confounded business. But his misery was appalling—a formless, helpless misery that made him wring his hands there in the middle of the hot street under the column of the Madonna of the Immaculate Conception.

He walked away. He crawled away. That, at least, was the way it seemed to him. He wanted to get as quickly as possible back to his room from which the wooden shutters kept the fierce light. He wanted to hide away. His reflective processes were crippled. He slipped into the shadow of the Via Borgognona. In a moment he was in front of the hotel. But he couldn't get past the *portier*, who had a seeking and an anxious look in his eyes.

"There is a telephone message for you, Mr. Austin."

"A telephone message?" he repeated, blankly.

"Yes, from Mrs. Brawley at the Hotel de Russie."

"Yes, yes. Well?"

"She wants you to come there as soon as you can."

John stopped short. His first thought was that something had happened to his mother and that Esmeralda Brawley had been selected to give him the news. He couldn't, simply couldn't, with that suspicion in his mind, with the grip of that terror on him, take the drive to the Hotel de Russie. His practical instincts reasserted themselves at last.

"Get me Mrs. Brawley on the wire," he bade the *portier*.

He stood there chafing, tormented. At last the *portier* handed him the receiver. Esmeralda Brawley's voice was tearful.

"Oh, is that you, Mr. Austin?"

"Yes." His throat was dry. "D'you really want me to come right away?"

"Please do! Dick's done something terrible. I don't know a soul from home here except you. I thought maybe you could persuade him to change

his mind. He's deceived me dreadfully. Of course he didn't want me to phone you. But I just had to do something."

John laughed in his unspeakable relief. "I'll be with you in twenty minutes."

IX

AT THE Hotel de Russie John Austin was asked to come upstairs at once. The large and handsome room of the Brawleys looked as though it had been wrecked. Trunks stood open; grips had been turned upside down; the contents of some of these receptacles had been heaped helter-skelter on the beds. Esmeralda Brawley with distinct tear tracks down her large cheeks stretched out both hands to John, squeezed his, and then continued, as she evidently had been doing, to walk up and down the room with an agitation in which, genuine as it was, neither dignity nor elegance was forgotten.

"Dear Mr. Austin," she gulped. "*Dear* Mr. Austin ——"

She was overcome. John did not see Doctor Brawley. But the door of the bathroom was open and from it came the professor's voice.

"That you, Austin? Damn' fool trick to drag you here. Wait a minute. I'm coming."

John asked Mrs. Brawley—he had to say something—whether there wasn't anything he could do right away? She shook her head lugubriously.

Although John, left for a minute to his own inner devices, noted almost objectively that there was a queer little sting of longing and terror in his viscera, he couldn't help feeling a spirit of comedy in the air. A little bitter, perhaps—but comedy just the same. Unbidden, he sat down on what appeared to be the only chair in the room. The others were concealed under garments and linen. Esmeralda continued her tragic striding up and down.

At last Brawley appeared in the door of the bathroom, collarless and in shirt sleeves, wiping his ears vigorously with a towel. He had been shaving and had cut himself, and every now and then dabbed viciously with his towel at his scratched chin.

"How are you, Austin? Glad you found a place to sit. From Esmeralda's goings-on you'd think some one had died—at least."

He laughed his ironical laugh.

Esmeralda stopped in her striding. "Mr. Austin, I know that Dick's making fun of me.. I know he always does. He thinks I don't know it. Oh, I do, only too well. I remember the day he called me 'chicken-minded.' It was only once. He's a

philosopher and thinks he has to keep his temper. But that once was enough."

Brawley looked stern. "Come now, Esmeralda. I don't think Austin is interested in the psychical intimacies of matrimony." He laughed without, somehow, losing his sternness. "You've dragged him here. Now tell him what for."

Brawley shook a didactic forefinger at his wife, who stood still in front of John.

"Mr. Austin, I was getting ready to pack this morning when Dick tells me abruptly that our passage is not engaged, that without letting me know he made the president give him a sabbatical year and that he wants to spend the winter in Capri in a house where the water has to be brought upstairs to the bathroom in buckets."

She gave a sob and repeated, "In buckets!" The ignominy of that word seemed to be too much for her. She turned away to hide her tears and stood in front of the window. John looked at Doctor Brawley questioningly. The philosopher looked a trifle sheepish. He reddened under John's gaze. Then his lips tightened and he, in his turn, began to walk up and down.

"Superficially, Austin, but purely superficially, my springing this thing on my wife may seem in-

excusable to you. It may seem cowardly. Well, it is. All I can say is, you've never been married!"

Something between a wail and a wild laugh came from the hidden face of Esmeralda.

"I thought you said that Mr. Austin wasn't interested in the psychical intimacies of matrimony."

Brawley stood still. "If you have anything more to say, go ahead. If not, let me explain my side of it."

Esmeralda shook her head in muted agony.

"Very well," Brawley resumed. "The point about marriage is this, Austin, that you get tangled up in little things, in trivialities; and another point is that no man ever gets to realize how facile and superficial the emotions of even the best women are. I was afraid to tell Esmeralda about my plan. She would have wept and called up all her best friends in Columbus and seen the president's wife. Oh, she'd have been loyal to me; she would have figured as a devoted wife trying to keep her husband from making a mistake. And she'd have been sincere, because she's constitutionally incapable of seeing beyond her nose."

A sob was heard from Esmeralda and a sound that might have been, "Buckets."

Brawley laughed. "For four years I've tried to

write a book. I've got hold of a new conception of the foundations of a strictly scientific idealism which is the thing this age needs. And in Columbus I go to parties and return calls and dinner engagements and have to join the God-forsaken faculty dancing club and kow-tow to the Wagenbauers—the Wagenbauers!"

He waved the towel which he was still clutching.

Ironically Esmeralda cleared her throat. "Mr. Wagenbauer is *only* the most influential trustee on the board. It's he and Jessie that got you your honorary doctorate."

"Trustees and honorary degrees be——" Brawley dropped his arms. Then he laughed. "The same year they gave an honorary doctorate to one of the biggest political crooks in the country. I earn my salary. I don't need the Wagenbauers. However, we come to Rome. And in Rome our time is wasted by a *principessa*—from Youngstown. Now I want to write that book. I tell Esmeralda about the plan, and what she sees is not the foundations of scientific idealism. What she sees is—buckets!" He threw back his head and laughed. "America is a fool country, a trivial country. There isn't a woman in Europe who hasn't been brought up with enough respect for

the intellectual life—as such—to avoid the mistakes made at home. The able men that I've seen destroyed or turned into deans! Well, well ——" He quieted down and looked thoughtfully at Esmeralda's back. "You go to your sister in New York for the year, Esmeralda, and I'll stay over here and write."

Esmeralda swung around. "A nice scheme," she said with icy politeness. "Beautiful. And what would people say? That we had separated, I suppose. I never expected you, Dick Brawley, to fall so low. No, I've come to the conclusion that I'll bear the thing as best I can. I'm your wife and it's for me to submit."

Brawley laughed. And there was a touch of despair in that laughter. "All right," he said. "Meantime, we might all have some luncheon together. That's the least we owe Austin after the show we've given him." Towel still in hand, he retired into the bathroom.

John leaned forward in his chair. "I found, too, that I couldn't work in Columbus, Mrs. Brawley. It's a real problem. I suppose you can get plenty of servants in Capri."

Esmeralda looked melancholy. "I dare say. But it'll be frightfully lonely. I had arranged a

series of little teas—literary teas, you know—for the winter at home. I attended some in New York last winter. They were sweet and *so* improving, don't you know? One got such a lot out of them. I said to Dick at the time that we must have some literary teas. From the way he acted then I might have known that he had this dreadful scheme up his sleeve. Men are so secretive, don't you think, Mr. Austin? I'm so different from that—just right out with everything. Oh dear!"

Brawley came back fully dressed. He looked at his wife.

"Go wash your face, Esmeralda. Then we can have something to eat."

She went into the bathroom, suddenly exchanging her elegant walk for an obedient little trot. John saw at once why this marriage held together. She annoyed Brawley to the quick. In the end she obeyed him and looked to him for protection.

The luncheon was clammy in atmosphere. The Brawleys were both emotionally exhausted. If John hadn't had that moment of final insight into their relation to each other he would have been astonished at their demeanor now. Esmeralda quietly served her husband, who patted her hand in thanks. Toward the end of the meal Brawley

shook himself free of his weariness and his preoccupations.

"How's your work getting along, Austin?"

John shook his head. "Not very well, I'm afraid."

Brawley leaned back. "What's the matter with us Americans? We can't be productive at home. We come abroad. Can't we be productive here, either?"

"I don't know yet," said John. "It seems to me that I've been on the edge of the explanation again and again. But I get no further. I'll stick it out. I may find ——"

He stopped and a warmth suffused him to his innermost being. There was this evening. There was Ranieri's. There was—silently he tasted the exquisitely exotic syllables—there was Esther Azancot.

Brawley shook his head dubiously.

"I hope you do."

They took leave of him. Husband and wife seemed quite united now. They apologized together for having been a nuisance, sent their greetings to his mother, and asked him to call on them often during the month they had still determined to stay here before proceeding to Capri.

Having left them, John Austin felt lost. The inner warmth had faded. There were still hours and hours before he could go to Ranieri's. The doubts and fears of the morning gnawed at him. Who was she? What was she? And, worst of all, what business of his was it? He could answer none of these questions. He only knew that a flame burned in his breast. He smiled at himself sadly for using this old *cliché*. Yet how apt it was, how accurately descriptive of precisely what he felt. But he knew definitely by this time that his heart was embarked on a great adventure.

He went back to his hotel and tried to rest; he tried to write a long-overdue letter to his mother; he tried to read. He finally made up his mind that walking would help. He stopped at the Piazza Colonna and loitered at a café and watched the people and the soldiers pass. He had never seen so many soldiers: *carbinieri* in their swallow-tailed coats and cocked hats; neat, callous-looking infantry officers; black-shirts, the Prætorians of Mussolini, who smoldered—every one of them—with a touch of arrogant fanaticism; slouching sailors and loutish privates and young medical officers looking rather top-heavy and foolish under curved Æsculapian helmets. It all gave him a

feeling of discomfort. He remembered the stories he had heard of the obtrusiveness of militarism in pre-war Prussia. Well, here it was all over again. And though he was instructed enough to know about some of the military adventures of his own country in, say, the Caribbean, he was glad that you could walk in any American city without being offended by the constant glitter of the sword.

He hoped somehow that Esther—he couldn't help calling her so in his thoughts—was not an Italian, even though he knew, of course, that the Italian people were, like every people, innocent of the follies and crimes into which force and propaganda prodded them. He didn't, as a matter of fact, think that she was an Italian. He was even surer that she wasn't French. German was out of the question. Spanish? It was possible. But he didn't like the thought, either. He found himself wishing that she might be American. How foolish and how provincial! As if that mattered! He had never known an American woman, except those two or three girls at college whom he had been too shy to make friends with, who had her poise, her blending of delicacy and frankness, her naturalness of movement in the world combined with what he could not but think extraordinary

feminine grace and beauty. He knew the serious progressive type of American woman—his mother; he knew the sweet, fluffy, foolish type—Esmeralda. The former was without grace; the latter had, in youth, abundant grace and sweetness. But she had nothing else. He had heard and read of other types. They hadn't come his way. Yet Columbus was so typically American. Maybe he didn't know all about Columbus. Amusing thought.

It was a wretched afternoon to get through. Finally all devices failed. Freshly bathed and dressed, he arrived at Ranieri's half an hour before he could possibly hope to see her. But here, at least, he was, and the restaurant was dim and soothing. Quite contrary to his custom, he ordered a whisky and soda, which helped to relieve his inner tension. He was glad of the artificial hope it gave him, for she was quite ten minutes late. But it seemed to him that there were no such things as weariness and suffering in the world, nor had ever been, when suddenly, sheathed in white, she stood in the doorway, looked quietly about, and then, with the ghost of a smile, came toward his table.

He had risen. He stretched out his hand and

felt for the first time the light touch of her cool skin.

She sat down. With an easy gesture she took off her hat and passed her hand over her heavy hair. In all her movements there was an abstraction, a preoccupation. He felt sure that she was sorry now that she had let him come. She would much have preferred to be alone. His heart sank. At last he saw her eyes turn to him. She smiled.

"Don't mind me. I have had a busy day."

He was tempted to say, "Then you're not just a tourist?" But he didn't dare. Instead he said, "It makes me ashamed of my own idleness."

"Yes?"

Her little foreign way of saying that was utterly noncommittal, quite incurious, too. But he found himself telling her about the Brawleys. He knew he was painting the anecdote up somewhat, making it both a little more tragic and a little more amusing than it was. To his delight, she listened more and more interestedly. When the waiter came for their order she gave him a quick, impatient look:

"A little later."

So John finished the story in his best manner.

X

SHE made no immediate comments. John Austin said he hoped he hadn't bored her. She shook her head. The waiter appeared again. John ordered absent-mindedly. He was watching her. She ordered a salad and a little wine mixed with seltzer. She folded her eloquent hands in front of her. At last she turned toward him.

"Tell me, are you and this Doctor Brawley typical for America?"

John loved her little foreign turns of speech. "We're typical of a large class, undoubtedly."

"The ruling class?" she asked.

"There is no ruling class in America."

She smiled. "You will give me no information unless you are frank. I am told and I read that the people of older English stock are not only the ruling class, but have consciously made up their minds to stay in the saddle. How otherwise do you account for your exclusion of immigrants?"

He laughed. "You are well informed."

She frowned a little. "You treat a woman like

a Victorian gentleman. I thought American women were politically very active."

He reflected. "They got the vote," he said, slowly, "and they do vote, especially on certain issues, largely so-called moral issues. But the women I know are politically not very well informed. World politics, except sentimentally, aren't in their line."

"Yes, I think I understand. Very curious. But I will tell you what I was thinking about you and your Doctor Brawley. You're aristocrats, really. And you're not aristocrats of the soil. So you're *déracinés*. What is the word?—rootless ones. You tell me you could not be productive at home. You think you will be productive here?"

John leaned forward. "I hope so; I think so. You have no idea how comfortable and narrowing life is in America, how it lacks edge and tang. I can't get excited over business or even politics. The path is too smooth. Here, of course, I'm an outsider. That is, in a sense. But here the imagination is stirred and there aren't any trivial interruptions."

She looked at him with a smile in her eyes. "Will you forgive me if I say you know very little about yourself or your problem? You say America

is so comfortable? Ah, I could tell you a different story."

"But you've never been there?"

"True," she admitted. "That is true."

But he was aware, of course, of her inner reservations. She thought that, upon the whole, she did know and that he wasn't being frank with her.

"I don't mean," he said, "that there aren't poor people in America, though they're probably better off than the poor of Europe. But everywhere in the world writers and journalists come from what you'd call the middle class. Isn't that so?"

"Very generally," she admitted.

"All right. Well, in my particular middle class, middle-Western American environment life is dull and shut in."

"Undoubtedly. And so you escape here?"

"Yes."

She laughed a pleasant laugh touched with indulgence.

John joined her, though he thought the laugh a little at his expense.

He didn't care, and it occurred to him with a thrill that her critical frankness gave him the opening he was yearning for.

"I've told you all about myself," he said.

"You've told me nothing. All this afternoon I was trying to guess, are you Italian or French or— Tell me about yourself. Please!"

She grew beautifully grave. She lifted her chin a little. Her eyes with their bronze glow accentuated met his. "Gladly," she said. *"Je suis Juive."*

A thread-thin trickle of ice started somewhere within him. With overzealous haste he said, "Yes, yes. But I meant—I meant —" He lost himself stupidly. "You are French, I take it." That surely was recovering himself nicely.

She raised her brows a little. "No, Mr. Austin, I am not French. Ah, I see. It is because I spoke in French just now. It is the European language that is most natural to me. I was born in Morocco, you see. Yes, and I have a French passport, if that is what you want to know."

"I don't, of course." He dared ever so lightly to touch the back of her hand with his. "I want to know about you, the real you."

His sincerity was evident. Her smile was comradely.

"I understand you. The Jews you have known have probably all pretended to be Americans with just a different religion."

"Certainly. Not even so different. I'm a Unitarian, so far as I'm anything, which isn't very far. The pastor of my mother's church in Columbus and the rabbi of the synagogue often exchange pulpits. So that's the reason I thought it was strange that you should tell me about your religion —"

Again, confound it, he was tangled up and didn't quite know how he had come to be so. He had the subtle feeling that he was on the edge of wounding her. Why? He wouldn't have done it for the world, Heaven knows, not for anything in the world. What was the matter? And why didn't she help him out? Why did she watch him so earnestly? Then she spoke. How that slightly husky voice of hers sank into him!

"And it was, Mr. Austin, because, as you so nicely explain, we're practically of the same religion, that you had that horrid little inner discomfort when I told you I was Jewish? Was that the reason?"

"I had no inner discomfort!" He threw his whole soul into the denial.

She looked down at the tablecloth. Her finger played with a little salt that had been spilled. "Your denial means that you sincerely don't wish

to offend me. I know that." Her eyes turned to him. "I know that. So we can afford to be honest. Why did you have that disagreeable sensation?"

"I don't know." His tone was dull.

"I will tell you. Because these liberal religious gestures are superficial and misleading. You would not have had your little shudder if I had said I was French or if I had said I was a Lutheran or even a Catholic. It had nothing to do with either a passport or a place of birth or a creed. It arose from a matter of race and of historic character. I knew that you wanted to know about what you call the real me. That is Jewish. Your little shudder proves it."

He looked at her. He thought her beautiful and somehow—he did not know how—tragic.

"I can't reply to you. I haven't thought about these things. I must, I will, if you want me to. All I can say at this moment is that you have all my respect and all my admiration."

He was immediately amazed at himself. He had never spoken so before. He did not think that anyone he knew had ever spoken so. But this was Rome and here was—she! He watched her, waiting for her answer. Her voice, when it came, was a little weary; its huskiness was deeper.

"Yes, no doubt that is true at this moment. And you feel it all the more pleasantly on account of the background of magnanimity, of generosity, of —of—yes—unbending."

"Please!" he pleaded.

She smiled at him. "You are young, Mr. Austin, like your country."

He felt boyish. "I bet I'm older than you are, just the same. I'm thirty-two."

"You are four years older than I and at least a thousand years younger." She reached for her hat beside her. "I must go."

He was so proud to follow her out past the bowing waiters. In the soft darkness of the street he asked her when he might hope to see her again. She refused to make any definite engagement. She said that she was staying several weeks longer and that they would doubtless meet again. He insisted that he must be sure to see her. She shook her head a little sadly.

"It is foolish. But then we are all driven to do foolish things, I suppose."

They had reached the hotel and he was terribly tempted to kiss her hand as he had seen men do in this part of the world. But he didn't have the

courage of that gesture. So he followed her to the elevator and shook hands with her there.

For himself, the notion of going upstairs to his room or of sleeping was not to be entertained. He went out again to wander through the Roman streets with his pain and his delight.

Romance has been cheapened and the word love peddled like fish about the common markets of the world. Pain and disillusion and the attritions of life have fruitfully employed the better story-tellers of our time. It remains true that a high and romantic passion may be pure of both dross and folly and may indeed irradiate and lift the soul. It is a fact that the source of this glory is a biological instinct. Is man not the more marvelous in that he can transmute a biological instinct into poetry, into aspiration, into a fire that burns his whole world clean?

John Austin's body was lighter than it had ever been. It was tireless. He felt as though he were forever to be exempt from hunger, pain, from all the sordid needs of mortality. The details of his talk with Esther Azancot stirred only at dim moments in his mind. He had no time for them now. All that he wanted of this hour was its transforming strength. For the first time Rome became one

to him and gave up to him its secrets. He reached the Forum of Trajan in his walk and saw no more, as he had seen hitherto, a barren inclosure with an iron fence about a few dozen broken columns, the whole guarded, like all the antiquities of Rome, by a heavy pontifical inscription. He saw palaces and temples from which a world was ruled; he saw grave Romans there and also men from all parts of the empire, of the glowing Mediterranean world. He fancied himself a Roman amid those columns, and Esther a princess of the East. He saw himself in that scene freed of all his American inhibitions, bending over her hand, declaring that not time but intensity of feeling counted, that a flash was as good as a century, and that she was his and he hers. He swept away by the power of his waking dream all the obstacles of character and circumstance, and saw himself united to this woman who had struck from him an incomparable music and an unknown fire.

Verses formed themselves in his mind—verses that seemed to him the best he had ever written—freer and fresher and more spontaneously eloquent. He hurried back through the dark streets, hugging those verses, fearful of losing so great a treasure, and with hot cheeks found himself at last

in front of the writing table in his room. He worked and worked. Only it was not like work; it was like an outpouring even though his critical intelligence was awake, was burning indeed with a fierce and icy light. The poem got itself finished; the last lines came, perfectly formed, so swiftly that his pencil could hardly keep pace with his creative ardor. He threw it down. His eyes were moist. An exquisite weariness flooded him at last. He laid his head upon his folded arms and slept.

Roman Summer

Part Two

I

JOHN AUSTIN came to love very greatly the gardens on the Pincian Hill. He came to love them in the clear strong sunlight of the early hours of the day, and even more when, in the late afternoon, he could see the far dome of St. Peter's loom duskily in the afterglow. He had long given up any attempt at systematic work. He wrote a letter now and then; he read little. He wandered alone after breakfast in those gardens. The oleanders were in bloom; the heavy white and waxen flowers of the magnolia hung amid their thick pointed olive-colored leaves. From afar he caught glimpses of the Italian pine trees with their broad tufted tops. He always thought these pine trees singularly magical. The oleanders and the magnolias, though more southern and exotic, were trees of a real world. The pines were trees out of a dream of childhood.

He was fond of loitering in front of the Aurelian obelisk and of reading the inscription which told how for ages the beautiful shaft had been for-

gotten and thrown aside. Then a wise pope had found it and reërected it here to adorn "the lovely spaces of the Pincian Hill." "*Amoena Pincii spatia . . .*" And always when he read these words he thought of Horace's prayer that there be brought him the "too brief flowers of the lovely rose"—"*nimium breves flores amoenae rosae.*" To John Austin that word *amoenus* (lovely) came somehow to stand for the beauty of Rome and for the beauty of Esther Azancot and for palm and broken column and for that sunny octagonal garden in the Vatican from which you reach the cool corner chambers in which stand the greatest statues of antiquity. A poignancy clung to that word for him and the pathos of things immeasurably beautiful, but even in their beauty half lost and defeated. The word gave him a homesickness for the very things that it stood for to him, although these things were present to his sight and touch, as though his contact with them was certain to be brief and not quite real.

He could dream of Esther Azancot here, since it was here that she would oftenest consent to meet him. Once he had persuaded her to drive with him to the Colosseum. But she had been silent and depressed within that great circle of craggy

walls. They had wandered on past the ornate arch of Constantine and had come, almost unaware, face to face with the Arch of Titus. And John had tried to persuade her to pass under the arch and look at the famous reliefs that he had never seen. But a strange darkness had stolen into her eyes, a somber hostility. And she was still somber when, later on, he had assured her on his honor that he had not known that the reliefs pictured the triumph given to Titus for his destruction of Jerusalem and of the Temple of God.

Here, on the Pincian Hill, in these gardens, she was often gay. They would sit on the pleasant benches here or have tea in the grounds of the Casino or wander along the walks looking at the rows of statue busts. John preferred the Roman corner and was amused at the Italian names inscribed on the busts of the Roman poets. Esther preferred the heads of the Italian poets and composers. She lingered again and again near the haughty, bright head of Alfieri and even oftener by the warped, sad, deadly face of Leopardi. From the sight of it she sought relief by regarding the features of the friendly Rossini or the serene Palestrina. But into this world John could not follow her except by an effort of the imagination

and they always ended by sitting down at a small table to the right of the Casino near the bust of Vittoria Colonna and having their tea.

How many talks had they not had during the swiftly slipping weeks. Not only here, but elsewhere. At dinner under the formidably curving vaults of the Basilica Ulpia or in simpler places out of doors in the cool Roman nights. They had driven out to the baths of Caracalla and stood, small, isolated, intimate, on the now grassy floors of those enormous ruined chambers. They had strolled along the Appian Way and stood before the tombs that bordered the majestic road to Rome. They had talked and they had become friends—friends! John Austin repeated the word over to himself with a touch of bitterness.

She had the dearest ways, it seemed to him. Her light, firm touch would often tighten on his arm; she would stop and pick a bit of thread from his shoulder. But he soon came to see that these gestures had no meaning beyond themselves. She was simply more demonstrative than the women of his race in whom these trifles would have meant a definite reaching out after him. In addition, she was accustomed to comradeship with men. He had once remarked on that to her and she had

answered that such clear comradeship between men and women was precisely what she would expect to find in America. He had to admit that he, at least, had seen little of the kind, that at his university, for example, the relations of the young men and women, however harmless in final fact, were surrounded by a constant atmosphere of sexuality. He explained to her such terms and things as "dates," "cases," "spooning," "petting." To his surprise, she had laughed and said that she envied these young people. They had evidently not been forced by life itself into heavy intellectual preoccupations, but could live blithely according to their instincts of play and pairing. And she had added what he had scarcely understood: "The truest comradeship between men and women flourishes under the pressure of some danger, in the toils of some necessary conspiracy."

"Conspiracy?" he had echoed, wonderingly.

"The service of the best cause needs a conspiratory element. That's human nature."

Of that, as of many other remarks of hers, he could make little. He got a general sense from her that she was bound irrevocably to some interest that wholly transcended the personal. She had told him gladly enough, when at last he had had

the courage to ask, that she was not married nor, so far as she knew, likely to be. But of this other force in her life which seemed to be so commanding she would tell him nothing, not out of secretiveness, he was very sure, but because he seemed to her obviously incapable of comprehending. She often treated him, in fact, as though he were a boy, though a dear boy, and at such times it seemed to him that the steady fire burning in his breast would droop, as he had seen flames do, and smolder and throttle him with its fumes.

He had turned on her once, suddenly aware of how far he had left behind him the ways and speech of Columbus.

"Do you happen to realize, Esther, that I love you?"

She had grown almost stern.

"I hope you are mistaken, John. If you are not, I am much to blame. But you are. Of course you are."

It had been in the very gardens of the Pincian Hill that this conversation had taken place. They had dined on the veranda of the Casino and had watched the lights of Rome flicker up through the gloom. Then they had walked in the gardens and had sat down on a remote and shadowy bench.

The lights had been few. Only one or two of the newer marble busts had gleamed faintly in the soft darkness. A heavy, sweet scent floated toward them from the magnolia blossoms. John watched her profile; a faint fragrance came to him from her heavy dark hair and mingled with that of the blossoms. He leaned toward her and put his hands lightly but firmly on her shoulders and kissed her on the lips. She had not resisted. She had not responded. But her passiveness had somehow quenched his impulse. Soon she had risen and spoken with a dry deliberateness of indifferent things. But even such speech had soon faded into silence and they had parted coldly on that night, although John had had a torturing half conviction that her coldness was feigned and defensive. But he had little experience of either love or of the subtleties of character and did not possess the courage of his instincts.

For almost a week thereafter she had eluded him. This was not difficult, since by a common silent consent they did not wish to emphasize their friendship even to the indifferent eyes of the people in the Hotel Inghilterra. Thus John Austin had been left in an empty world. For he found that Rome was to him now often but as the

scenes painted on the canvas wings of a theater among which he wandered powerless to make them real. He would stand before the Fountain of Trevi, and the strong and quaintly graceful baroque figures suddenly seemed absurd to him, as absurd as they would seem to a wholly untutored American—things out of a world to which his relation was artificial and self-suggested. He loved the bright play of the waters, of the hundred leaping gleaming streams. But was not the water, too, tortured and contorted to purposes of which his innermost self had no instinctive knowledge? Else why did memory and imagination turn precisely here to the homely little Scioto River flowing quietly past the few willows and maples on its grassy bank? He found to his amazement that he did not even read Horace with his old relish. The Rome of Horace, dreamily envisioned in America, had been more real than the Tiber now seen with the eyes of the body, than the Castle of San Angelo, than the tombs along the Appian Way.

He could not say that he was homesick. He was sick, all during that week, for but one thing, the sight of Esther. But Rome and she had somehow become one to him, and with her gone Rome was empty and without meaning. He tried hard

enough to be sensible, carrying within a deep assurance that she was not lost to him. He tried, among other things, to write at length to his mother. He had kept her half satisfied on casual picture post cards. She had tried to comfort herself with the belief that he was hard at work. He did not want her to believe that, not because it mattered so greatly in itself, but because he felt the need of keeping a more or less veracious relation to the world from which he came.

He sat before the blank sheets of the letter paper. There was nothing he could say. There was no way in which he could formulate to his mother the facts concerning what had happened to him. Was he to tell her that he had fallen in love? Mrs. Austin would not have considered that in itself an unwelcome thing. She would have wanted to know with whom. If he had said with a French Jewess, that wouldn't have shocked Mrs. Austin at all. She would, in fact, have a magnificent time, illustrating by her approval the liberality of her temper, her freedom from vulgar prejudices, her international mindedness. Queerly enough, the prospect of this probable approval irritated John Austin more—of this he was quite certain—than the prospect of a shocked and grieved

disapproval would have done. He couldn't for the life of him tell why this should be so. He knew, however, that his certainty arose from some sense of life that Esther had communicated to him, some mystery that had not become words between them but had been passed from her to him. So the sheets before John remained blank and he bought more cards on which to tell his mother that he was well and didn't know exactly what his plans would be yet.

The Brawleys had long left Rome. John Austin had to admit to himself during that fatal week that he had fallen low indeed. He would have welcomed the chatter of Esmeralda. He would, had she been on the spot, have been almost capable of confiding in her. He knew she would have said, "How terribly romantic!" It was a blessing that she was away and that he was spared that possible shame.

But the days were empty and void of resonance as cracked and hammerless bells. The notion of writing either prose or verse had become somehow monstrous. It seemed to John Austin that all his ideas were of an unbearable triviality. He was ashamed of all he had thought of attempting. He knew suddenly that it would be pallid, derivative,

wholly without the pang of life. Had Esther communicated that sense of necessary inadequacy to him, too? They had talked little of his plans or hopes for work. All other things had seemed more important to him. She had asked, but he in a kind of shame had brushed the matter aside and she had not insisted. It was one of her qualities that she never insisted. She was never eager. She was warm; she was interested; she was never eager.

He had not seen her for five days. He could have borne the inner pain longer. He had always been a patient man. He did not, above all, want to offend her delicacy; he knew her to be too honorable and open to leave in silence and slight and affront the spiritual rights which her admission of him to her friendship and familiarity had given him. No, it wasn't mere lovesickness or lack of trust that forced him to seek her out, to force a meeting. It was more. She held a secret, a secret that concerned him profoundly, fatally. He did not know how or why. He did not believe that she knew. But he was convinced that merely by being what she was she had the answer to his riddles.

He waited till the evening of the fifth day. Then he asked if Mademoiselle Azancot was in

her room. She was. He didn't wait for the slow elevator. He leaped up the stairs. He knocked at her door. She opened it and stood framed there in a kimono of heavy, gold-colored silk. Without a word she stepped back and let him come in. Her face was grave and, he thought, a little tired.

"Esther," he said, quite simply and frankly, "I couldn't stand it any longer. I'm sure you're not small enough to be just offended."

"Of course I'm not offended."

"Exactly. And of course you wouldn't just leave, either. We've been too close for that. So what's the sense in making me suffer by not seeing me?"

She motioned him to a chair and herself sat down. "You're quite right, dear John. I have been so puzzled as to what to do. It is all my fault. All —"

"What is your fault, Esther?"

She smiled. "That this entanglement, that this difficulty—exists."

"I don't understand. You talk as though there weren't any possibility of normal human relations between us. I love you. That's very simple, isn't it?"

"No, it isn't simple."

"It is!" he cried. "It is! And either there's a chance of your caring for me or there isn't."

She put her hand for a moment over her eyes. "I think I'm going to tell you a story," she said.

He looked at her intensely. At least she was not denying the possibility of her caring; at least she was not sending him away. And perhaps the answer to his riddles would be in her story.

"Do," he whispered. "Please!"

II

ONCE in a while she struggled after expression. But it was not often. Now and then she used a French instead of an English word. But John Austin did not in fact realize that until later. What came to him now was less her words than her voice, and arising from that voice a vision. She herself in all her memories merged landscape, background, instinctively and completely with the souls and deeds of men. She sat in a low chair, bending forward a little. She held the heavy silk edges of her gold-colored kimono in her eloquent ivory-tinted fingers; her arms were crossed over her bosom. At intervals she raised her chin a little and her eyes, dark in the shaded light of the room, sought his. He was moved, as he had been from the beginning, by that slight veil of huskiness over her voice. She did not employ many modulations. She used no strong or passionate words. The story she told, her story, was real, immediate, insistent and at the same time incredibly ancient. It was relentless reality and sounded like a legend in his ear.

What first she made him see was the Moroccan town of her childhood and early girlhood. The desert was at the edge of the town; the desert swept in. Every tree, every tuft of grass, every puddle of water, was a miracle and a conquest. The world was a world of golden sand. Sand in flat levels, sudden hills, long sloping dunes over which the hot wind swept, leaving its strange and delicate tracery. Golden sand and golden sun. Sometimes the breeze would come from the north, from the sea, and one had an almost agonized vision of the glory of blue water and white surf and of lands beyond, dreamlands as yet to the child, where the gold was the sober gold of wheat and where the earth was green. Here in the desert there were huddled huts, gleaming white in the direct rays of the sun in spite of grime and straw thatching. Through the alleys plowed with dark bare feet the hooded Arabs and Berbers in their thick yellow and scarlet burnouses. They led their tawny swaying camels by dusty silken ropes into the desert. You did not notice the pungent stench of men and beasts. For the desert sand has an odor on these roads of the East which, though faint, sickers into the blood. You remember it beside Northern waters and in the theaters of

great cities and it draws you back. It draws you back.

When the tall Arabs in the alleys of that town met a Jew they cursed him. "*Yehudi ibn Yehudi*" they growled. "Jew, son of a Jew!" The Jews had been there for four hundred years, ever since the great expulsion from Spain. They still spoke Spanish among themselves. Most of them were terribly poor. Sultan after sultan had enslaved them, robbed them, inflicted stripes upon them. Conditions had been more endurable for many years now since the Europeans had come into the country. Oh, the Europeans didn't love the Jews. But formal justice was done. Purely formal. So the little girl had grown up without fear—physical fear, at least. The more so as her father was a physician who had studied in Europe and was among the chief men of the Jewish community. The family lived in a handsome old Arab house with great cool chambers that had windows on a courtyard. Under the flagstones of the courtyard was the cistern. Beside the house grew four ancient cypresses. At night you went up on the roof and saw the dark cypresses against the velvet sky and the stars that were like great drops of silvery liquor and, as the little girl thought, might fall

some day and form small unimaginable pools in the dark, endless nocturnal desert.

Her childhood was lonely. Her only brother, much older than herself was at school in France. The mother was soft, tender, still lovely. But she had not had a Western education. All she could do was to tell stories, legends. Some were magnificent. Some were grotesque. But they were always the same. The father was absorbed in his work, was troubled concerning the affairs of the community, the affairs of his people. He would confer with the rabbi—a dark, beautiful person with a long, silky beard of burnished black who wore a robe of stiff black silk and a biretta with a silk roll that made it resemble a turban. They would speak together in Hebrew. And their talk was difficult and intricate. Only Esther remembered that her father was trying to persuade the rabbi that it was not enough to obey every jot and tittle of the Law and wait for the Messiah. Israel must arise and be its own Messiah.

A day came, a strange no less golden treacherous day, on which the little girl was kept close in the dark cool house. In the middle of the afternoon the door flew open and in faltered the beautiful rabbi. His biretta was gone; his silken robe hung

in tatters, great jagged tatters. His cheek was cut from eye to mouth and the blood streamed and spattered all over him. But he was still gentle and still dignified and only moaned softly while Doctor Azancot sewed up his wound. Esther, crouching behind the door, half ajar, of her father's operating room, saw it all. She didn't cry; she wasn't really frightened. She was tense and quivered a little. She was eight years old then. She didn't speak of the incident. There was no speech about it in the household, either. But when, next evening, the elders of the community gathered behind the closed door of her father's office, the little girl prayed and dreamed of herself as a sister of some new Judah Makkabi or Bar Kochba tending the wounded in hollows of far hills.

At twelve she was sent to school in France. She lived with kindly, simple, orthodox people from Metz. She went to a day school. The Christian girls petted her and made much of her at first. They had a taste for the exotic; it was distinguished to be a Colonial. Colonials were rich, too. Then some one passed about the word that Esther was Jewish. She had taken it for granted that they knew. Then there were veiled allusions and sudden snickers and exclusions. Groups of girls

would suddenly separate when Esther approached. She had loved one girl—a slight girl from Normandy with hair like ripe rye. She tried to cling to her. But Annette blushed and stammered. She was afraid of the others, afraid of being unpopular. And because she was really fond of Esther there was a struggle within her. But the pain of this struggle she resented to Esther and in this little emotional conflict lost her head, her exquisite stupid rye-blond little head, and without warning, in the middle of the playground, to free herself from any suspicion of unconventionality, struck Esther a blow across the cheek and cried, "*Sale Juive!*"

From then on Esther isolated herself. It was a stern life for a girl. She read and studied and was friendless and alone. Oh, there were girls of her own people. But these wanted to forget and be French, French only—and could not forget and were not permitted to forget and nursed a sullen hostility toward her because it never occurred to her to be other than she was. She met a youth at this time who had heard faintly the voice of the new nationalism of Israel. They took a few walks, lingered for a few autumnal afternoons by the

Seine. Then the whirlpool of the war sucked him in. She never heard of him again.

Her brother Gershon had gone to England. There she was sent, too, when she was sixteen. She came to love England, of course. There were no taunts. There was no discrimination. Though known to be a Jewess, she profited involuntarily from the wildly Francophile spirit of England in those war days. The French would have none of her; the English adored her because she was "so French." By now her reason was fully awake and she saw through the tragic absurdity of such a position. She joined a group of young people of her own race who had all come to an identical conclusion, who repudiated the madness of Europe which they had known in peace through exclusion, insult, pogrom, and which had now boiled over into this bestial war. The eyes of these young people were turned to Zion and the young men were all chafing and begging to be sent to join the Jewish Legion that was to help General Allenby liberate Palestine from the Turkish yoke.

Many of them were permitted to go. Among those who went was Gershon Azancot. Esther saw him only once or twice in his lieutenant's uniform. She had, in fact, seen little of him for several

years. He had been in Flanders in those interminable battles for a rain-soaked hillock or a stretch of dune land. He had been wounded. His body was fully restored. But in his eyes Esther saw that his innermost being was in revolt, in colossal disgust against a world in which such things could be. She knew that he had a fatal certainty that he would not survive the war and had but one hope, that, after the degradation and despair of these years, he might die in a battle not utterly useless and fratricidal and mingle his dust with the dust of the land of Israel.

She saw him go, knowing it was forever, seeing a vision of her father when the news would come that his only son was dead. All this the girl bore silently; all this she buried within herself. Allenby and his legions marched through the desert; the Turk retreated and was driven to the north. Gershon Azancot lived to enter the Holy City and was then shot in the head in an obscure skirmish amid the Galilean hills.

There followed dim and troubled years. Doctor Azancot would not let Esther come home. He dreaded for her the barrenness and sordidness of the sun-baked Moroccan town on the edge of the desert. He feared war. The Berbers resented the

rule of both Spain and France and knew that the victory of the Allies would confirm these powers in their African possessions. Esther pined for the sun. Through London fogs like yellowish cotton wool she went to Whitechapel to nurse and teach among the refugees from the Eastern war zone, amid filth and despair and the babble of tongues she did not know. But here, even here, amid the despised and rejected and those corrupted by having been made outcasts, she saw so much of the beauty of the spirit, so much of the tarnished glory of her people, that a hatred crept into her mind against a world that doomed these people to such a fate.

But this was not the most terrible thing. This was only an echo of ultimate terror. That ultimate terror came when the counter-revolutionary armies had been beaten back by the Soviets and when the Jews of the world were made aware of the actions of the counter-revolutionary troops. The generals of these troops, Denekin and Petlura, had been given arms and money by the conservatives in all lands. Esther had sat and broken bread with people in London who had done so, who had taken it for granted that she, the daughter, after all, of a gentleman, was at one with them in this enmity

toward the wicked and vulgar communists. And now the veil was lifted from those desperate Ukrainian plains.

This time Esther asked no one's permission. She went to Russia with a relief unit. The workers entered Russia from Rumania. On rough carts they were dragged through endless mired roads, past endless ragged and ruined forests, through a world that had returned to chaos—oh, worse than chaos, to the desolation of destruction and blood and stench. Then came the Jewish villages of the Ukraine where the soldiers of Petlura had amused themselves, had played their drunken pranks. Charred ruins—black, nothing but blackness. Decaying corpses in the ruins, naked corpses of women, corpses of women slashed and torn, with flesh ripped off and bitten through. And stillness. No sound of man or beast. No sound at all.

The relief units went into the forests. There they found children, Jewish children, living a wild, forsaken, hungry life. And when the children saw men and women they fled like beasts. They had to be coaxed; food had to be left for them in clearings. When they were caught they fell on

their knees and begged and implored: "Shoot! Shoot! . . ."

Esther Azancot fell silent. She bowed her head deep down. Her hands sought her temples. Thus with veiled and hidden face she went on.

"Little children, my friend. They were little children. And they begged with tears to be shot. Do you know why? Because they had seen so many of their people tortured to death—tortured very slowly and drunkenly and bunglingly by the officers and soldiers of the counter-revolution. So their idea of mercy, the only idea of mercy left them in their world of ruin and charred houses and outraged bodies, was to be killed quickly and not messily. Can you see that? Can you see those children in the woods? The older boys and girls were the hardest to convince that human beings could still be human. And even when they believed that we were Jews they still shied at the sight of tools or weapons. They still quivered at the sight of a pick-ax or a spade. You see, the chief sport of the soldiers had been to bury men alive. So the older men made bargains with them. The old Jews showed the soldiers where everything of value was—any money or gold or silver. And in return they asked that their sons be shot

and only they, the fathers, be buried alive. So these watchful fathers tried to be present at the execution of their sons to be sure that the young men were really killed quickly and mercifully. Then they proceeded to dig the graves into which they were to be thrown alive.

"This thing did not happen once or twice. This thing happened many, many times. And the boys and girls in the woods had seen it happen many times. And they had to be nursed back slowly into a belief that the world could be a human world and not a desolation of demons."

Esther raised herself from her half-kneeling posture. She drew herself up and arose and went to the mantel and stood with her back to John Austin.

"In Columbus, in the state of Ohio, most nice respectable people believed in the counter revolution, I suppose?"

John bowed his head, not realizing that she could not see him.

"Did they not?" she asked.

"Yes," he said out of a dry throat.

"And did you ever there, in your nice city, hear of these other things?"

"I believe I heard my mother speak of her friends, the Davids, gathering for a relief fund."

"But your mother had been much more excited about the imaginary Belgian children who had never, of course, been hurt."

John got up and walked over to her and touched her lightly on the shoulder.

"Esther, why do you tell me this? Why do you ask that? I have no more responsibility in the matter than you."

She turned about and faced him and the bronze glow leaped into her eyes and he knew that she knew how conscious he was of the feebleness of his protest.

"It's late," she said. "But that doesn't matter. Let me finish. I think you see already."

He lowered his head.

"Poor dear," she whispered.

III

A SILENCE fell upon the room and those two stood there with aching and divided hearts. John Austin groped for words, although he knew that words were stupid and inadequate. He knew, too, what she was telling him through her story, telling him about herself and himself. But it was the deepest and purest and best part of his American self that he would not and could not accept anything as irrevocable in an evil sense. Like every American, he was a born meliorist, a believer in the manageableness of things. He knew his words to be crude. But he knew that there was a true and straight feeling behind them. He wandered back to his chair.

"Look here, Esther, all that's frightful—more frightful than anything I ever heard. But it's over now and we've got to hope that the world is getting decenter and more humane. You ought to come to America. All of us, of all races and peoples, live together there with mutual respect and good will. All of us ——"

She turned to him and her sad, enigmatic smile silenced him somehow. She went to a corner and brought out a little table on which stood a samovar of copper. In a minute the blue flame of the spirit lamp was playing about the reddish metal. She sat down behind the samovar; she looked up.

"Let me go on while we wait. This is nice tea I have. You like it, I know."

Her memory of his tastes in the little creature comforts of life always touched him so that his throat burned. At this moment it came to him with an all but unbearable poignancy. She took it quite as a matter of course and smiled at him. Then she went on with her story.

The Ukrainian experiences had left her sick and exhausted. It had taken months before she could sleep without hideous dreams. She had rested at a little town in the Austrian Alps; she had healed herself through a daily and hourly vision of the great sides of the hills covered with straight dark fir trees, of a clear cold green lake at her feet and a radiant glacier where, on the horizon, the hills merged into the sky. Then she had taken the long trip home to Morocco. But there she had found only idleness and desolation. The loss of his only son had dried up the springs of hope in her father,

who worked incessantly to forget. Her mother wailed or busied herself with little things—with Sabbath candles, with cleaning the house of leaven before Passover, with suspicious complaints that the meat she bought was not ritually prepared. Esther had confronted her father. She told him that she was willing to do her entire duty. She had asked him if she was of any use at home. He had shaken his head. He had admitted that her mother would wail a little louder if she went and speak of her as an undutiful daughter. But he had swept that consideration aside. "Where shall I go?" Esther had asked, hoping he would answer according to her desire. He did, without hesitation. "To the land—to Eretz Israel." The matter was settled.

Esther poured the tea into fragile old cups and the single gold ring with its strange design glimmered on her hand. She gave him a cup. He sipped. He felt wretchedly inadequate. He wanted her to continue, to get through, to let today, this hour—this hour of life which included him—burn between them.

"Did you go?" he asked.

She had gone, of course. First they had wanted her to do clerical work in Jerusalem. But she

might, save for the view of the hills from her window, have been sitting in an office in London. She chafed; the work seemed insufficient. She took a brief, intensive course of training as a nurse and was sent to the north, to the ancient hill city of Safed. The streets were stairs of great blocks of rough-hewn stone, and at the top of such a street in a crumbling whitish house Esther lived with the old physician of the Haddasah Clinic and the physician's wife. Downstairs was a waiting room and an operating room, and there Doctor Bentheim and she worked ten and twelve hours a day. Out of the searing sunlight came in not only the poor of the house of Israel. The Arab women came with their children whose eyes were blear. They had heard that the Jews could cure trachoma. And old Arab men came who were blind or almost blind and also hoped for cure. They sat in the waiting room with the infinite fatalistic patience of the East. When the sun sank far west into the sea and the gray head of Hermon stood out, fire-touched, above the other mountains of the Syrian highlands to the north, Esther and the doctor would be so weary that they could hardly drag themselves upstairs.

Yet she found peace there. For many months

she found peace. The endless, humble, appointed tasks were like a narcosis. She came to understand in Safed the security of subordination, the luxury of the soldier who has yielded up his will. She began to recognize the character of her condition and a restlessness stole into her quietude. Although this restlessness became almost feverish at times, she stuck to her post.

Esther's voice trailed off into silence. Her head drooped. John Austin twisted his hands in sudden impatience.

"Please go on," he urged her.

"I was remembered there in Safed. I was called away suddenly. It was thought that I could be more useful elsewhere. I have been—oh, it seems to me I have been everywhere: in Vilna, in Bucharest, in Sofia, in Budapest. Everywhere our people are oppressed and bruised; everywhere they are hopeless and in many places they are hungry. I was in Warsaw during the epidemic of suicides. And the help that can be brought is so small and ineffectual in comparison to the need."

John got up and set his cup on the mantel shelf. "Are you working here, too?"

She nodded. "Italy wants the hegemony of the Mediterranean. She is opposed to our colonization

in Palestine. We have a bureau here in order to convince the Italians of the peacefulness and harmlessness of our work."

"How long will you stay?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "That is hard to say."

"You are under orders?"

"Yes."

"Can't you free yourself?"

She laughed for the first time that evening. "Dear friend, I had almost forgotten who you are. We're not a Gentile revolutionary committee nor a secret society. We have no signs, oaths, passwords. Nothing of all that. If we work for the cause we do so freely; if we accept orders we do so freely. If I lost interest to-morrow I would resign. My friends wouldn't even blame me. They'd respect my feelings and even try to understand them."

"And do you ever lose interest?"

Again she shrugged her shoulders. "We aren't any of us always at the height of a given situation. I have hours and days in which I'd like to cast off the burden, in which I'd love to join the bright life of your world. Oh yes, I wouldn't be human if that weren't true."

His eyes caught hers and held them. "All right! Cast off the burden and marry me."

She did not lower her eyes, but clasped her hands. "I've told you my story quite in vain."

"You have not." John Austin felt a glow rise within him, a force that would compel her. "In your eyes I may be only a stupid American. Perhaps I am not so stupid. It isn't true that what you have suffered and experienced divides us fatally; it isn't true that America is as cruel and hopeless as Europe. I wouldn't interfere with your interests or activities there. I'd even share them. I'd do anything. I'm not blind to the tragedy of your people or the beauty of all you've done. And I love you."

Her eyes had fallen; her hands were still clasped.

"The trouble is," he went on, wearily, "that you don't care for me."

She arose. "Stay where you are, John!"

A flame seemed to go through him. "Yes; well?"

"You're wrong. I do care for you. You're so uncorrupted, so—so—uncomplicated. You are kind." Her voice sank. "Oh, I mean that in a way you can hardly realize. Division and hatred

and terror are like a disease in the Old World. No one is quite whole. I do believe that America is different. You make me believe it. You make me believe it by what you are. Oh!"

"Esther!" he cried, and took a step forward.

She shook her head. "Nevertheless, it's useless, John."

"Why? Why?"

"One hasn't only a past; one has a future. I had a friend in England—a much older woman than I am. She'd married an Englishman, a splendid chap. He wanted to be a very good husband; he really loved her devotedly. But I know from what happened later that she kept her married life happy by a hundred wretched little concessions and emotional lies."

"How did you know? How could you be sure?"

"Because one day her small son came home from school and said he didn't want to go to that school any more. It wasn't a nice school. And in fact little Arthur Cavendish across the way wouldn't play with him any more because he went to that horrid school. And my friend felt herself grow pale and asked Robbie why it was such a horrid school. She wanted, you see, as you're fond

of saying, to face the music. And Robbie cried out in that clear, cool childish treble of his, 'Because it's full of sheenies, mumsie!' "

"But that ——"

She cut him short. "Oh yes, it could happen in America. It would. I'm better informed on that point than you are. But you didn't let me finish. When my friend's husband came home, she told him the story. She told it coolly and in a matter-of-fact way. She was the more objective in her statement because she had a cold, premonitory dread deep within. He said: 'I'm most awfully sorry, Rachel, and I wouldn't for the world want your feelings to be wounded. I didn't tell you on that account, but I was opposed to the school from the first. Our son shall never fail in personal respect for his mother. But he is the son of an English gentleman and that school is no proper school for him!' "

"But I ——"

"Please forgive me for interrupting you again. But I am sure you think at this moment, because you care for me, that my friend's husband was a brute. He wasn't. He was not only not a brute; he was entirely in the right. He wanted his son to live the life and think the thoughts and accept the

loyalties of his race and nation and even his class. That was inevitable. He himself, the father, was no vulgar anti-Semite. He didn't want his son to be one, either, of course. But there were other things that he wanted him to be so much more—positive things—than he wanted him *not* to be that, well, that the matter simply didn't weigh in the balance. Naturally, necessarily."

"What did the child's mother do?"

"Nothing. What could she do? She had made her bed. She sent Robbie to a fashionable school. But from that time on she shivered a little every time a Jew crossed her threshold. And every time she met a Jew in the street, especially a poor Jew, a Jew from the countries of the great oppression, she felt as though she were guilty of the insults and the stripes and the injustices that he had suffered and she wanted to sink into the very earth."

"But that was morbid!"

"It wasn't. She was quite right. Oh, overwhelmingly right. Just as right as her husband was. Robbie is quite a growing lad now and he thinks of entering the diplomatic service. And he dislikes Jews just a little more than his fellows because, though it's never mentioned at home, he

feels that he has to be specially conventional and patriotic and prejudiced on account of the alien blood in his veins."

John crossed the space between them. "That's all very subtle and horrible. It's one case. And cases differ. You say you care for me. I don't believe it. If you did, you wouldn't reason and tell me anecdotes. You'd have faith! You don't care—that's the trouble."

She put her hands on his shoulders. Her eyes were close to his. She drew him forward and kissed him on the lips. He clasped her then and saw her shut her eyes and her cheek grow pale. A moment she rested so. Then softly she slipped away from him.

"Do you believe me?" she almost whispered.

"Yes—now ——"

Her eyes were bright with tears. "Go, my dear. It's late."

He wanted to protest, but her eyes moved him so, touched him so with their pain and their sincerity, that he went out. He heard her shut the door slowly behind him. When he turned quickly the door was closed, blank, desolate.

IV

JOHN AUSTIN sat in front of his table in his room. The table was neat. It showed none of the disorder of work. The blinds were drawn. Yet a great luminous triangle of sunshine lay on the floor. He stared at it. He roused himself. He had better read his mother's letter which the morning post had just brought. There were six sheets, twenty-four pages, in her long, flowing, ugly, legible hand. She said that she had been busy recently and had neglected to give him any news of home. There wasn't, she supposed, much that would interest one who was in Rome and was engaged in creative work. But after all, she added, with a touch of fatuousness rare in her, home was home. She *must*, trivial as it would now seem to him, tell him about the Earnharts. It was rather pitiful and rather sordid. But the scandal in Columbus was tremendous; she understood that it was even worse in Toledo. He had really made a mistake not to have a Columbus paper sent him in Rome. If he wanted them, she would send him

the clippings; she would have done so to-day except that she didn't know whether the sordid stuff wouldn't annoy him. Anyhow, she couldn't help telling him.

It appears, then, she went on, that Mr. Earnhart —the most vulgar of the local papers was figuring him as Pa Earnhart and his wife as Ma Earnhart on the analogy, Mrs. Austin guessed, of the comic strip "Polly and Her Pals"—yes, well, it appears that Mr. Earnhart had been called up in the place where he worked by a local dry-goods firm, telling him that his wife's bills were outrageously overdue and that the firm would take out a judgment against him and garnishee his salary if he didn't settle at once. The poor man hadn't even been aware that his wife had an account. He had left his place of business on the plea that he wasn't feeling well and had, by his own account, taken a long walk to clear his head and figure things out. Three hours before he could possibly be expected he had reached his own house and had heard even from the corner the sound of the piano and laughter and screeches. Having already, as he put it, figured out a thing or two, he thought he'd go slow and watch. He had slipped into the house and surreptitiously peeked into the parlor. There he

found an afternoon party of young men and women. Grace had on an expensive dress which he'd never seen; there were plenty of refreshments—must have been ten dollars' worth, he thought—and the life of the party was, of course, Bud Holloway. His wife was there, too, in a dress of gray silk.

He slipped upstairs and rummaged, especially in Grace's room, into which usually he never set foot, and had found all the evidence he needed to account for the telephone call that had shocked him so. He had pulled the frocks of silk and lace and velvet out of the closet in which they were hung up and had turned upside down a drawerful of silk underwear. He had stood there amid that scattered finery and had thought of the two hundred and thirty dollars that he would now have to borrow and pay off week by week by denying himself all the poor little comforts of life. And suddenly the injustice and the shamefulness of the whole thing had roused this usually quiet and peaceful man so that he had succumbed to a dreadful rage. He had gone into his own and his wife's room and had grabbed a thick old walking stick of hickory that he had once cut and trimmed himself

when he was a boy on his father's farm in southern Ohio and had rushed downstairs into the parlor.

According to Mrs. Earnhart, who tried to pretend that her husband must have been ill, he had babbled incoherently. But Mr. Earnhart had declared in his evidence that he had called the thing and the people what they deserved, had smashed the dishes and splashed the strawberry ice cream on the floor, and had then and only then, when jeeringly Bud Holloway had cried, "Watch pa trying on the rough stuff!" turned on that smooth and dapper youngster with the result that had brought the whole affair into the courts. For Bud Holloway had had to be removed to the university hospital with severe bruises and contusions, a broken nose, and a three-and-a-half-inch wound in his scalp. The elder Holloway, being summoned from Toledo, had promptly brought suit against Earnhart on the charge of aggravated assault and battery. Earnhart was out on bail, awaiting trial. At this point, Mrs. Austin wrote, public interest in the affair was beginning to wane when, through one of the best firms of Columbus lawyers, Mr. Earnhart brought a counter-suit against young Holloway for seduction and breach of promise and asked fifty thousand dollars in behalf of his ruined and de-

serted daughter. A curious circumstance, Mrs. Austin commented, was that Mrs. Earnhart could be persuaded only with the greatest difficulty to give the necessary evidence in regard to her daughter's treatment by Bud Holloway. She pretended to be sick; she pretended to faint in court; she seemed to be inspired by a curious malice toward her husband. She didn't want him, as Grace's legal guardian, to win the suit and have the handling of the money. She acted as though she had succeeded in escaping from his tyranny and penuriousness and been brought to naught by him again as so often before. She spoke of Bud as "the poor boy"; she didn't think "there was no harm in him"; if only—she wept—Mr. Earnhart had minded his own business, everything would have been "fine and dandy."

Wasn't that too funny? Mrs. Austin asked rhetorically. She apologized for boring John with this matter at such length. Neither the one trial nor the other, she understood, would come off. Mr. Holloway was sick of scandal. He had offered to drop the prosecution of Mr. Earnhart for assault and give the Earnharts twenty-five thousand dollars if they, in turn, would drop their suit against his son and leave Columbus immediately. This

she had on the best authority—from Mrs. Wagenbauer, who had it from the wife of one of the firm of lawyers retained by Mr. Earnhart.

John dropped the sheets of his mother's letter on the table before him. His imagination involuntarily spun on the story she had told him. He understood poor, besotted, self-deceived Mrs. Earnhart. She had persuaded herself that with a little more time, another chance, she could have brought Bud to the point of marrying Grace. She had seen herself as young Holloway's mother-in-law, received in the Holloway "mansion"—John could hear her say: "mansion"—in Toledo, playing the lady, the member of society for the rest of her life. All this, this ineffable dream, had been brought to ruin. At the moment of ruin what had been a mere possibility had turned into a certainty in her feeble mind and the blame for the destruction of this certainty she fastened on her husband.

He could see the Earnharts. He could see them leaving Columbus. He could see them at their table somewhere—the two women hating the man with their eyes. He could see them stripping him gradually of the money received from Holloway. He could hear Mrs. Earnhart: "Your pa couldn't

wait for you to be married respectable. He wanted to sell you. Well, he did. An' now he grudges you the money he got as the price of your shame." Yes, oh yes, Mrs. Earnhart would say, "The price of your shame." He could see Earnhart beginning to drink in a quiet way, finding it hard to get a job somewhere, expecting to invest the money, seeing it grow less, losing some of it in his inexperience, growing morally slack as his wife's attitude toward his taking of the money sickered more and more into his mind, drifting away from his family after a while, drifting back, by a deep instinct, to the farmlands of his boyhood, working at odd jobs, a little boozed, telling interminably and shakily and somewhat mysteriously how once he got the better of one of "them millionaire crooks! Yes, sir! Who? Well he don't live so very far from here! No further'n Toledo. No, sir, no further'n that!"

And Mrs. Earnhart and Grace? John saw them clearly enough, too. Mrs. Earnhart would be presiding over a lodging and boarding house in an industrial town of Ohio or eastern Pennsylvania. Oh, she wouldn't take mill operatives. Her establishment would be strictly for gentlemen. There would be clerks, under-bookkeepers, assistant ac-

countants, some young, some youngish. John seemed to see one of these youngish men especially —blond, watery-eyed, beginning to get bald and trying carefully to hide it, rather incompetent, but earnest, not likely ever to make more than thirty-seven fifty a week, attracted by Grace's rather gross charms. He saw Grace at about twenty-eight, frightened of fading before she had secured a man. She would have been engaged several times, but each time the story of Bud Holloway would somehow, in forms incredibly distorted, turn up again. This time—well, the baldish accountant had heard the story, too. But he told Grace he didn't care. He believed in purity. He hadn't always been all he should have been himself. He was forty and wanted a home. Furthermore, he loved her and would be good to her. Grace, rather disliking the man, rather despising his very decency and kindliness, unconsciously already furious at his inability to give her either money or social position, would marry him out of weariness, out of a hankering after the supposed dignity of a married woman. They would live in a dingy little house and at first things would go tolerably because the man had saved a little money. The savings would go; a child would come; Grace would have to rent a

room to live in the kind of neighborhood she liked to live in. She would buy furniture on the installment plan and dress the child beyond her means and station, and the thin accountant, quite bald now, scraggy, with a great Adam's apple moving up and down under his reddish skin, would sit on the porch smoking a stogie and reading the evening paper while Grace, grown very large and a little flabby, rocked in her rocking-chair and talked to the lodger. The dance of life. The everlasting repetition. What was its meaning? What was its end? "The years slip by, slip by!" The Horatian verses came unbidden into John's mind: "And you must leave your house and bit of earth and your delightful spouse, and of the trees that you have planted none but the hateful cypresses will follow their short-lived master!" Beautiful verses: "*Linquenda et domus et tellus et placens uxor.*" Beautiful and suddenly quite empty. The expression of an aristocratic civilization utterly perished, almost unimaginable. What had that to do with the Earnharts? What had that to do with himself?

Dazed, he arose and walked up and down. The triangle of sharp Roman sunlight on the floor had grown greater, had spread, was like a pool upon the floor. He seemed to himself suddenly

strangely exposed to life. How warmly he had been wrapped in those American imaginings of his, in weaving that tapestry of being, gray and homely and dispiriting as the colors of it were. The pageantry of Rome passed before him: the ineffable vaults of St. Peter's, the thousand lights, the soaring voices of the unseen choir, the bronze statue of Peter with its foot, its metal foot, half worn away by the kisses of pilgrims; he saw the great round tower of the Castle of San Angelo and the vast hollow of the Colosseum and the noble column of the Piazza Colonna which Marcus Aurelius, having conquered the barbarians in a mighty war, dedicated, as a memorial of these deeds, to his father Antoninus Pius. He saw the great renaissance palaces and villas, saw once more in his mind's eye the endless splendor of paint, the thrilling gold of the primitives, the bronze and scarlet of the later masters, the saints and princes and confessors, the Madonnas and Crucifixions, the endless rhythm of form, the trees and meadows and dreamy waters behind the lords and severe ladies and the great symbolic figures of Latin Christendom. He saw all this, saw it with an almost hallucinatory vividness—had he again a touch of Roman fever?—and saw it, by a strange

enough circumstance, looming above that unseen, only imagined, boarding house of Mrs. Earnhart in—perhaps—Pittsburgh—and saw the dining room of that dingy American house and the soiled cloth on the table and the shoddy plated ware and the ugly, heavy cups and saucers with absurd floral designs, and felt a nostalgia after that house and room, that cloth and those hideous knives and cups.

Was it mere homesickness that was gnawing at him in this magnificent and alien world? But indeed he was not homesick. Except for Esther Azancot. With the thought of her he had gotten up that morning. And he had wondered how he would get through another day of her four days' absence. Then his mother's letter had come and he had, of course, read it.

He looked at his watch. It was barely eleven. Esther would return from Brindisi to-morrow. Then he would feel more at home again. With her this world seemed less alien. For she somehow belonged in it in spite of her opposition to it. She understood it, took it for granted, with both its beauty and what she considered to be its abominations. Yes, she was coming and he would not give up hope that she would somehow find the faith to follow the instinct that drew her to him. At

that thought his heart seemed to lift itself up physically. It was only to-morrow, only to-morrow.

It occurred to him that he couldn't really have finished his mother's letter. She couldn't have written only about the Earnharts. He picked up the sheets, standing beside the table. He was right. Naturally. Mrs. Austin wrote that she was having the house done over a bit; she gave an amusing account of a lecture before the American Collegiate Alumnae, of which she was secretary. She asked about his health, his work—especially his work. He turned the page. There was a postscript: "Do you keep in touch with the Brawleys? On the campus here it is rumored that Professor Brawley is not going to take his sabbatical year, after all—at least not in Italy; that he is coming back home. The climate, they say, doesn't agree with Esmeralda. That doesn't sound like a probable story to me. Of course Esmeralda has no brains, never did have any. But I thought she might have enough decent instinct to let poor Dick Brawley do what he wanted to do for once. I used to say that Dick might have done worse. I'm not so sure any more. Whatever you do, John dear, don't marry a fool."

Thoughtfully John laid down the letter. It was all true about Esmeralda. No one knew that better than himself. Yet it was just possible that Doctor Brawley might himself not have found the beauty of Italy so conducive to philosophic thinking and writing as he had hoped. It was just possible. John would have liked to have a talk with Brawley. Life was far more complicated than his mother knew.

He put the letter away. He took up his hat and cane. Then he went back to his table once more, opened the drawer, took out the sheets of paper on which he had sketched the one-act drama in verse on the life of Catullus, looked coldly at the few dozen lines he had written and with a calm deliberateness tore the sheets into small bits. These he gathered up and flung into the waste-paper basket. He felt better and went out to luncheon.

V

ESTHER returned on the day and at the hour that she had promised. She was scrupulous in such matters. John had once spoken to her of her exactness in keeping appointments. She had replied that she was unpunctual by nature and for that reason had had to cultivate a strict regard for promptness. He now knocked at her door. She was there; she let him come in for a moment. But she was evidently quite worn out. She had something frightened and childlike about her and John wanted to take her into his arms and carry her away to some safe and quiet and familiar place. Standing in front of her, he told her so. She smiled and shook her head, and he thought he saw a moistness in her eyes.

"But it wouldn't, dear friend, be safe and quiet and familiar. We're safe and quiet only in this isolation here!"

"You're too tired to be argued with," he said and took her hand. "When can I really see you?"

A melancholy brightness, a defeated sort of

courage, suffused her. "I'm going to sleep. I'll sleep all afternoon and all night. Let's meet after breakfast in the morning and make a day of it—one more day."

With that he had to content himself. But he was calm enough during that afternoon and evening. At least she was once more under the same roof. And he felt as though he were watching over her although they were separated and as though she rested the more deeply on account of his watchfulness.

When in the morning they met in the hallway where a tablet in the wall told of the presence of a pope here once upon a time, he told her of these thoughts. She looked at him with earnest eyes.

"I felt your thoughts rest on me."

"I love you so," he whispered, deeply shaken.

She turned to him. "If only ——" She stopped.

"What? What?"

"If only we could make time stand still, and life, too, and rest at a given point."

"We can do that within ourselves if we will it."

She smiled. "Idealist! Where are we going?"

"Where do you want to go?"

They debated it a little. They took a cab that

was waiting below. It was a magnificent morning. The streets were full of flowers and Rome had its most naturally festive aspect. They agreed to drive to the Palatine and go into the Farnese gardens, those incomparable gardens built on the very roofs of the Cæsarean palaces and commanding the Forum and the city.

They walked to a bench on the edge of the gardens from which they could look down and see the ruins and the columns of the Forum and the red poppies in the grass. The air was hushed and golden. It was a week day and John and Esther were alone in the gardens. Below in the Forum they saw the dark figures of one small group of tourists with its guide. Amid the ruins were a few more isolated figures—young men and women sketching. But in the gardens there was no sound but the hum of a bee, but the gentle rustle of trees in the light wind.

John looked at Esther beside him. She had on a frock of raw Japanese silk and a little golden-tan hat. Although she was even paler than usual, he felt a glow proceed from her that was more of the spirit than of the body. Yet he felt that glow pouring itself into the channels of his blood. He caught, too, as usual, a breath of that perfume—

like sandalwood, like cinnamon, yet unlike either, which she used.

For a long time they sat there, not saying a word. Beauty was between them and harmony and love. And each knew that words would awaken again the thousand dissonances of the world. It was, at last, not Esther who spoke. She had the patience of the East and of her people. In her was the experience of the ages that recognizes the essentially tragic character of life. Therefore she could isolate deliberately a beautiful hour and live in it and snatch it first as a living reality, then as a consoling memory from the tumults and the wrongs of time. She was now seeing not only the trees and the flowers and the pageantry of ancient Rome; she was seeing herself grown old and white-haired, a mother in Israel, married in all likelihood to some Zionist official in Jerusalem or Haifa or Tiberias. She could see herself on the verandah of her house in Haifa which she loved above any place on earth, seeing the dark Mediterranean roll its memoried billows under the large white stars of the East. She saw that old woman that would be herself with great clearness. And she knew that old woman was remembering with a strange poignancy of emotion the days of her

youth in Rome and this delightful, kind, wise, impassioned childlike man and this hour in the gardens of the Farnesi. And she was moved almost more by that vision than by the present reality which was indeed already far from her under the aspect of that imaginative insight of the necessities of her life.

It was in John Austin, of course, that, as the minutes stole on, the pulse of the immediate began to beat. To him there were no impossibilities, no path appointed; his mind simply had no contact with such concepts. In his life at home he had in fact followed the usual and the conventional with far more strictness than Esther would ever have thought it necessary to do. Conventions meant nothing to her. But she had profound central perceptions in regard to life. It was these that John lacked. Once unleashed from convention and all roads seemed open to him, all things possible, all difficulties conquerable. They sat side by side, these two, liking each other with a deep and desperate liking, sundered in their innermost being beyond all hope of union.

John could bear the silence no longer. He began hammering at the same point. "Esther! You are listening?"

"Of course."

"Very well. You admit that you care for me."

She looked at him with that sad smile of hers. She laid her hand on his. "Yes, darling."

He could have wept at the word. She had never used it before. Had he indeed ever heard it before except ironically or as applied to little children?

"Well, then? Oh, my dear," he cried, "there aren't any real obstacles!"

She looked away from him. She brooded. "What *you* call obstacles, John, wouldn't seem nearly so terrible to me as to you. If either one of us were not free in a legal sense, for instance, that would trouble me little, provided my conscience were satisfied."

A strange little chill stole into him. "You don't quite mean that."

"Quite, quite. You see what strangers we are?"

He assumed a superior attitude. "Oh no, we're not! You only think such obstacles would mean nothing to you. Luckily there aren't any. We can get married at the Consulate to-day. To-day!" he repeated.

"And you think that the ceremony performed by the American consul would—what's that British phrase—do the trick?"

"Esther!" he protested.

She turned a little and faced him. "There was an old rabbi in a Carpathian village. When couples came to him to be married he asked: 'Have you already married each other? For,' he would explain, 'I cannot marry you; I cannot make you one. I can only confirm something that has already happened in your hearts. I and my ceremony cannot make that thing to happen.' "

"Very well, Esther. By your own admission the thing has happened!"

She shook her head. Then she pondered. "I don't know why I like you so well, John. Perhaps it is because you have so much goodness and because you are not weighed down as we are. It's our eternal longing for the Gentile world. But you, my dear—you like me because I'm different and exotic and not like the women you have known? Tell me, how many have you really known?"

"None." His tone was humble, proud, and firm. "You are my first love."

She bowed her head a little. "How shall I answer that without seeming wicked to you and at the same time seeming not to respect you? And I do!"

"Go ahead," he said.

"You see, my dear, if I'm the first woman you've known with any intimacy, you can't know me at all. I'm all glamour to you and not human. And you'd want me to keep on being glamorous and not human. And I couldn't, don't you see? If there wasn't anything else to divide us I'd insist, after that confession, that we live together awhile first to see if you could bear a human woman at all."

He felt himself grow pale. "You're talking nonsense again!"

"I'm not. Oh yes, I am, too." Her expression suddenly became severe. "I'd forgotten England. You're evidently like that. You wouldn't respect me unless an incantation had been said over us first. I'd somehow slide into the class of women who are not 'good' and the experiment of human living between two human beings wouldn't be an honest experiment at all!"

"You don't believe in marriage, then?"

Her voice was hard. "I believe in it so much, so deeply, so almost romantically that I wouldn't have it besmirched by *mere* formalism or force or ugliness or disharmony. But we're talking about different things. I mean a union sacred through

its own character; you mean a ceremony at the consulate and then a honeymoon and then satiety and respectability."

"And you're quite sure that a union between us couldn't be sacred through its own character? I say it could and would. I love you enough to bridge all differences."

She melted. "How dear you are and how full of faith!"

He smiled sadly. "*Amor vincit omnia,*" he quoted with melancholy self-irony.

"If only it did! It doesn't. Not what most people call so, anyhow. Look at us. We speak different languages in every sense. And you don't know the half of it. I have necessary friends, friends without whom life would be lonely and void for me, who speak English with a thick Yiddish accent and can't be made not to quote Hebrew and tell Jewish anecdotes." She stopped suddenly. She got up and her face flushed. "It's madness. Fancy me talking about them even in jest, even to explain something, from your point of view, from the well-bred Anglo-American point of view! Fancy my lowering them and myself by such a gesture!" She clasped her pale hands. "Let us have done with it! Let us say good-by now."

He had risen, too. He took her arms and faced her.

"I love you well enough for—anything. There must be something, some power in that."

"Let us go," she said, sadly.

They walked through the gardens side by side. Their beauty was darkened to John's eyes. It seemed to him suddenly gaudy and excessive, and all Rome seemed so to him, too.

"With all your subtlety," he said, slowly and gravely, "you miss things, too. If you married me and we went to America, you too would come to see the world differently. To take a simple instance: We're accustomed to people who speak with a foreign accent in America. We don't mind them."

"Perhaps. But would you ever *not* mind the accent of their souls? It is mine, too." She stopped once more. "Good-by, John."

"You don't mean that you'll leave me here, now, at this moment, forever?"

Tears were in her eyes. "Please, my dear. It is best so."

"But you are staying in Rome?"

"I leave to-night."

"And you knew that this morning?"

"I knew it, yes."

"Then there is nothing that can alter you?"

"Neither me nor you."

"I didn't mean that."

"I know you didn't. But that's it. That's it. Don't make it so hard for us both."

"But it's unthinkable, Esther, that you should go one way and I another from this spot and we should not meet again."

"What does the spot matter or the hour? Every place is a place of parting for us; this hour is as good a last hour as any. All hours have been last hours to us. I shall remember you. You will remember me."

"I shall, I shall ——" he choked.

"It's the best we have for each other—a memory."

She passed her hand lightly over his and turned and walked away. He stood there. He watched her. He could not physically pursue her. He wanted to cry out. He felt for a moment like an abandoned child that wanted to weep and complain that it had been hurt and lost and wronged. Then heavily, slowly, miserably he too dragged himself away from those beautiful and alien gardens in the Roman sun.

VI

IT WAS not until the after years that, in recollection, in the sad and luminous tranquillity of retrospect, the days that followed Esther's flight assumed shape and meaning in John Austin's mind. The time itself, as he lived it, was confusion. It held the heat and dust of life: the pang of passion, the terror of loss, conflicts that sprang from instincts of the very blood, implicated with millennial history and dependent on the fateful stars themselves.

He knew in those later years that he had been like a child—a man in intellect, a child in experience and perception. Nothing in the calm surface ripples of Columbus life had prepared him. How immitigably trivial it had all been: the voluntary forgetfulness of pioneering struggles, sting and dirt, the merging into a refinement and gentility borrowed from faint, bookish notions of England; *deraciné*, as Esther had said—a life, a civilization without earth or root or blood. And so a civilization of mild gestures to which the tragic

records of mankind in literature or history were but as pictures, faded pictures of things heartily believed to be impossible any more and if possible then a trifle vulgar.

Of course John Austin behaved like an adolescent. How else, as he said to himself much later, could he have been expected to behave? Not that his mind had not instantly and always acknowledged the justness of Esther's hesitations and tragic objections. He was no fool; he was widely read. He had read of such things and could rate them as literary values. But literary values they remained to him even on the lips of the lovely and vital woman whom he loved. Life was, to his Columbus instincts and habits of thought, a different matter, an easy one—steeped in a pink glow of optimism in which there could be nothing hopeless, nothing irreconcilable, in which, as he had remarked with a fatuousness that when he was gray still made his cheeks burn, *Amor vincit omnia.*. Provided everything was legal, of course. Legal, sometimes, by hook or crook. But still legal.

That optimism was, of course, no source from which to draw strength for a great decision. It did not know of the existence of great decisions.

There was a type of man, as John learned later on, who would have gone to Esther's room on that last afternoon and said to her: "You are right. Everything you say is true. We are bound to end disastrously, our love is bound to be a tragic one. Very well; I accept that disaster and that tragedy as the best conceivable content for my life, better than happiness, prosperity, tranquillity after any other fashion. Come!" She would have understood that; it would have been speech in her own tongue. Poor John wanted to go to her once more, plead once more. But what had he to plead? "We will, can, must, shall be happy in spite of, in spite of—all." And he had already a glimmering of perception of the unbelievable folly and triviality of such a plea. He raged against himself and against fate. But he let her go. Because words are needed for life and he had no words to speak to her. He beat his head with his fist and shook his fist at the hard sapphire sky of Rome. An instinct told him that there was a magic word. But in Columbus the acceptance of human life as necessarily and ultimately tragic was a literary formula quoted perhaps, like a slight impropriety, by bolder spirits in papers on Ibsen in a woman's club. It would never, at that period, have occurred to

John Austin that it had anything to do with him or anyone alive in the world. So he raged and wept and let Esther go.

But when, that evening, passing through the hallway, he saw the door of the room that had been hers open and looked in and saw the room rearranged with the empty and desolate neatness of a hotel room awaiting a guest, a hot despair ran through his veins. Heedless at last of what might be thought of his action, he ran down the stairs to the office of the *portier* and asked whether it was known where Mademoiselle Azancot had gone to. The *portier* turned lazily, indifferently to his assistant.

"Do you know where the Signorina Azancot went? Yes? Florence? Florence, Mr. Austin. I hope you are not leaving, too."

It troubled him in the midst of his passionate preoccupation—this hope of the *portier* that he was not leaving. He felt dimly that the man must be propitiated. Nor had he any mind for packing his few things, for making any final decision. All he knew was that, however foolish and hopeless and wasteful it might be, he must go to Florence. He hadn't really lost his head; he knew that Florence was a large city and his chance of finding or

encountering Esther small enough. He knew that he had no assurance that she was even there, that she had not already traveled on. He expected—what did he expect? He tried to clarify for a moment the obscure but passionate feeling that drove him on. He expected an answer, a final decision or—a miracle. A miracle? He asked himself again. And then he had, standing in that hallway, facing the hard eyes and wicked little mustache of the *portier*, a vision of Esther found in Florence, finding the pain of separation too great, yielding blessedly at last.

He couldn't, he discovered, leave till morning now. He assured the *portier* that he was coming back. His immediate task was now to get through the night. He had never known such tasks at home. But lately he had become inured to them. He had almost invented a technique for getting through nights of pain and longing, for inviting sleep, for shortening the hours before sleep could possibly come.

Dawn found him awake and numb. At the core of his numbness was a profound excitement. But he was able to curb this excitement and, once on the train, felt the narcotic of the isolation of

travel which he had experienced before. Life lay behind him, lay before him. The hour was peace.

Florence, immediately enchanting, awakened the pulse of pain deep within him once more. But soon, even as he drove to a hotel on the Lungarno, a hand of tranquillity seemed to be laid upon his unquiet heart. He recognized by contrast the restlessness, the vulgar business of modern Rome. He left his hotel as soon as he had seen his room and, wandering along the Arno, steeped himself deliberately into the serene loveliness of the scene. He reached, having by good luck gone in the right direction, the vaulted Ponte Vecchio and half crossed it and stood by the balustrade near the monument of Cellini and gazed into the quiet waters, gazed at the iridescent walls of the immemorial houses that hung over the stream. There was traffic enough on the bridge. As he had passed, people at the doors of the goldsmiths' shops had asked him to come in and look at their wares. Yet beneath traffic and chaffering there was the peace of beauty—the peace that permanent beauty has at its quiet heart.

He walked back and lost himself under the great arches and drifted into a silent street under them and, seeing cool, great arcades, followed

these and turned, as by instinct, and found himself passing the Uffizi and in the last glimmer of daylight coming into the Piazza della Signoria. Dimly on his right he saw the Palazzo Vecchio, on his left—he turned to face it—the lofty portico of the Loggia dei Lanzi. There came to him the sense of something august, of the timelessness of things utterly beautiful and perfect.

Dark fell. There was another night before him. Then there would be another day. Suddenly he had the sense which we often lose in emotional crises, that life would go on, must go on. That it would go on, unimaginable as that may seem, without the fulfillment of our heart's desire. And in the soft darkness of the Piazza he groped for the monition that had brought him to Florence, that presage of some answer to his question. The hope of meeting Esther seemed a stale folly now. And what else could this city tell him?

He was utterly weary. He asked the way back to his hotel. It was not far. But when he reached it he could not force himself to go in, but loitered beside the Arno under the stars. He did not want to be alone with furniture and rugs—with a bed and a table, with those indoor trappings that accentuate isolation and inner pain. The river and

the stars and a few dim cypresses in the distance companioned him.

He leaned over the parapet. What came to him through the mildness of the Florentine night was scene after scene of his boyhood. The eyes of the body saw the Arno and the lights of the city on the other shore and, far to the left of him, like dim towers and battlements, the Ponte Vecchio. And at the same time the inner eye, the eye of memory and imagination, saw, saw the tangled banks of the Scioto River rolling slowly through flat fields and the little shack by the river's side where he had spent so many summers. The shack had had two little rooms, one for his mother, one for himself. They had slept on rude cots under mosquito netting. They had done their cooking out of doors. He used to gather dry twigs and light a fire in a hollow of the ground under a primitive iron broiler. They would have steak and sweet potatoes roasted in the ashes. He could smell the steak and the sweet potatoes and the skin of his hands remembered the crisp, hot feeling of the roasted skins of the potatoes. Their Ford car stood near the shack. If it rained too hard or too persistently they just jumped into the car and drove into town. And then, perhaps soaked through because the car

was only an open runabout, there would be the delight of the shelter of the town house and of a bath and of dry clothes. Had anyone told the boy he was then that he would some day be in Florence and stand at night on the banks of the Arno, how that would have thrilled him! And Rome—how he used to have strange nostalgias for Rome! Reading his Horace in the warm grass beside the shack, scarcely daring to dream that he would ever behold the "yellow Tiber with waves thrown violently back from the Etruscan shore."

He had seen it all. "*Litore Etrusco*"—something had gone out of the words that was once there; something had gone out of his world that was once there. Here was the Arno and to-morrow he could roam about Florence to his heart's content and see the famous paintings in the galleries of the Uffizi and the Pitti palaces of which all the cultured people at home used to speak with bated breath. And, honestly, he didn't give a continental for it all. He wanted to see Esther—he wanted to see her eyes with the bronze shadow in their depths and her pale hands and her heavy hair and he wanted to hear that slightly husky voice. He wanted her. Or, Heaven help him, did he even want her any longer? Was it his weariness? Had

the subtle tranquillity of the scene melted into his blood? Was he an utter fool? For more desirable at this moment than the woman he adored seemed these lazy old memories, these sights and smells and sounds, the charred grass under the broiler at home, the feeling of the crisp, hot skin of the sweet potatoes against the palm of his hands. Oh, he was just tired and confused and had better turn in.

He slept long and late. Then he went out into the sunlight which was softer and mellower here than in Rome. The river glittered and the old houses overhanging it near the Ponte Vecchio had a strange withdrawn magic to his eye. But what he wanted to find again, and had no difficulty in finding, was that august Piazza della Signoria which he had seen in the dusk. Soon he saw the lion on top of the Palazzo Vecchio of the Medicis; soon he stood in the square. He wandered across to the Neptune Fountain to the left of the Old Palace and came upon the bronze tablet in the pavement which told him that on this spot Savonarola had been burned. And somehow this strange and terrible memorial seemed to remove farther from him this world of beautiful forms in which he moved.

It was not his world. It never could be. Its beauty spoke to him across centuries of time. That mattered little. It spoke to him across gulfs of experience, emotion, perception, that never could be bridged. How could he have imagined that he ever could gather any inspiration for any work of his here? Work of his! He didn't know any longer whether he had the slightest talent. But if he had it was a kind of talent that had nothing whatever to do with the gifts and the impulses that had built the beautiful buildings and wrought the pictures and the statues and even the verses in this land. He didn't really understand this beauty except as it was finished, as it was already old. Its sources in human experience, its birth—these were utterly dark to him. Ah, Esther had said as much, Esther had known—she, the beautiful and lost, perhaps as eternally estranged from him, estranged from him from the beginning of things on, as the statues and tapestries in the Loggia yonder.

He walked past the Old Palace and entered the Uffizi and the glow and glory of the walls told him that he was in the presence of greatness, of immortal things. He knew enough for that. An instinct assured him. And aimlessly enough he loitered in one room and another and recognized

the incomparable rhythm in the Botticelli pictures and recognized the statue of the Medicean Venus and remembered the picture of the statue in an old college textbook and how he had hoped some day to see it. But groups of tourists with chattering guides seemed to pursue him and he slipped into a smaller room that had maps on the wall.

Here it was very quiet and here his eyes could rest from the great blasts of color, from the splendor of gold and blue and scarlet. The maps on the walls were subdued in tone, and facing him there was a slab of grayish marble, a piece of the entablature evidently of a Roman sarcophagus. He went nearer to it to read the inscription, which was still crisp and clear. "*T. Claudio Fortunato Erepto Fatis iniquissimis*" ("To Titus Claudius Fortunatus snatched away by the most wicked fates.") Was it from parents to a son? From a wife to her husband? What hopelessness and what severity of grief! It did not strive or cry; it did not assuage itself with false hopes; it was too profound for many words. Gravely, briefly, bitterly it bore its witness to the cruelty of things—to the unchangeable, unescapable, final.

John Austin bowed his head and said farewell to his dream and to his youth. Rome and Esther

and this old and beautiful and alien world were not his; they could never be his. Even as those old Romans had given up their dearest with a few terse words, could he not give up an illusion, a shallow hope? Ah, it had not been shallow. He had not loved Esther lightly. He would remember her to the end of his days. But the scene of his days was not here; had he persuaded her to come with him she would still and forever have been far away.

VII

IT IS a superstition that resignation can be a pure act of the will. Unless the mind assents a man, though he may admit himself defeated, will protest while perishing. Time and the attrition of life may produce an apathy that apes resignation. Emotional force, like all else, is limited. But true resignation requires assent. Mind and heart must say, Yes, when dreams break and aspirations wither and beauty melts under our frustrate touch.

John Austin returned to Rome resigned. His mother, had she been there, would have seen that the lines of his face from nose to lip had become more deeply furrowed, that the faint touch of gray at his temples had spread. She would also have perceived in him, as he returned to Rome, an inner certitude that he had never hitherto possessed.

He himself had not yet defined the character of that inner certitude. Had he been asked to-day, words of answer would not have come to him. But he could not question the state of his own emotions. Not without profound pain, but without desire or

eagerness he could think of Esther Azancot upon the appointed ways of her life. And with no regret or disappointment he could regard the apparent failure and waste of his Roman summer. One thing alone he still thought it safer to avoid—the Roman scenes that he and Esther had visited together. It would have been his choice to leave at once. He wanted no renewal of what he now firmly recognized as a hopeless struggle. But passage to America was hard to get, even though John determined to sail third class rather than be long delayed.

Waiting was hard. He had nothing to do—nothing more to do here or hope here. Some day he would come back. But with another vision to another end. His waiting was broken on the third day by Brawley, who appeared suddenly, on a chance, as he explained, in John Austin's room at the Inghilterra. He seemed jovial.

"So you're still here. We're sailing next week."

John was deliberately noncommittal about himself. He wanted to hear; he burned to hear. He knew that he was somehow implicated.

"How about your year in Capri?"

"Hm! Capri. It's magnificent. But my wife was right about the buckets."

John laughed. "Tell me: just how?"

"Well, I'm not accustomed to having cleanliness a ceremony instead of a matter of course. I don't want to have to haggle about my morning bath. Of course you can take a dip in the sea now. In winter we'd have been dirty. That's all."

Brawley laughed his ironic laugh with which he was always hiding his real reasons and attitudes. John was determined this time to break through this defense.

"You say that's all, Doctor Brawley. Now I'm interested. Was that really all?"

Brawley leaned back in his chair. The irony melted out of his face. He was somber. "No. But such are the facts. I was bound in common honesty to agree."

"And beyond those facts?"

Brawley looked up. "Maybe I'd be doing a good action by telling you, John Austin?"

"You would."

"Esmeralda's right about the buckets. I'm used to American plumbing. But she's using that rightness to be wrong as hell. I'm through. I'm done for."

The great, heavy head drooped forward a little. John waited.

"I had it in me, Austin, to be the real thing. Not only as a thinker. As a writer too, by God! Well, there's the fundamental instinct. I married Esmeralda. The children came. The income had to grow as fast as possible. To be increased if possible. I was pushed from one unworthiness, from one betrayal to another. Not the worst kind, I grant you. I have colleagues who write sloppy popular articles for cheap magazines. No, Esmeralda can see that far. She would have done her own housework rather than have me an obvious intellectual prostitute. But she didn't see why I shouldn't rise in the profession. It's called 'the profession'!" He recovered his habitual ironic laugh. "She wants me to be dean. D'you know what that means? Being a clerk and a politician and going to teas and dinners and being nice—nice—oh, what a word and what a thing—to trustees' wives! Why not? says Esmeralda. You've got time. You teach only ten hours a week! Gad, Austin! I've been as much as a year on one article for the *Review of Philosophical Research.* Why? It takes the contemplative life to be a thinker. What chance have I had? Esmeralda dashes into

my study. Jessie Wagenbauer's on the wire. Can we come to her dance on Wednesday? I raise my hands in horror. But, says Esmeralda, Jessie counts on you. And the McNeils will be there, and Mr. McNeil, as you *well* know, Dick, is the only rich alumnus who has a sense of the needs of the Arts College and doesn't want to give money exclusively for the football fans and the horse doctors. D'you get the deep insidious process, Austin? Esmeralda agrees with me, shares my views without understanding them, imitates my very line of patter, as the vaudevillians say, is an ideal wife and—destroys me. Why? Why?" He got up heavily and stood before John. He raised his long, didactic index finger. "I'll tell you why. It's the genteel tradition, the un-American, undemocratic tradition of the American middle classes. You may remember that during the war I was accused of being pro-German?"

John nodded.

"It was a lie as they meant it. But was I going to deny the debt I owe to German thought and German thinkers and to my own teachers at Leipzig and Halle? Some of those men lived little better than American workingmen and their wives cooked and did the washing. But the men pro-

duced work. The whole world has to go to school to them. Some of my fellow students lived on two meals a day and had only two shirts in the world. They've been productive since. I've got the good will of the Wagenbauers and an honorary doctorate and I'm going home to be a dean! And what riled me during the war was the orgy of pro-British and pro-French snobbishness, which meant the glorification of the tea and the dinner dance and of dressing up and mistaking smartness for scholarship and millinery for literature. Understand me, I'm not knocking either English or French scholarship or philosophy. But we're not English and we're not French, and all that Esmeralda and her kind—yes, and even your mother, though she's a clever woman, and her kind—produce is a feeble imitation of all that's superficial and silly in British civilization."

John had grown white. "Like all the stuff I've written."

The great head of Brawley glowed. "Aha, young man! I rather thought that that was where the shoe pinched you. And so you thought you'd go to Rome?"

"Yes, I did."

Brawley laughed. "You should have gone to Oshkosh, figuratively speaking."

"Or even to Columbus," John said, slowly.

Brawley nodded. "Anywhere out of good society. That's it. To America, in other words. To the common people and the immigrants. Anywhere out of the imitation of British suburbia. Away from 'Cranford'!" He laughed. "It's not in my line. But my problem has led me to others. And I keep up a bit with the new writers. D'you know, for instance, that there are still circuses under canvas, as they call them, in America, tumblers and medicine men who travel in covered wagons? D'you know that show boats still ply the Ohio River? Gad! the picaresque romance a fellow could write! What were you working at here anyhow?"

John grinned. "A play about Catullus."

Brawley dropped his hands in mock despair. "Exactly. Well, you have a chance. I haven't any."

"What do you think you ought to do?"

"I ought to live in a village and be permitted to go about in old clothes and smoke and think all day. Now and then I should go to New York or Chicago and now and then to Europe. But that's

all. And not into 'society' anywhere or ever. But my boys are growing up and want to go to good colleges in the East, fashionable colleges, and I've let the spirit of gentility prevail too long to raise a row now."

A knock sounded on the door.

"There's Esmeralda. I told her if I found you I'd stay awhile and in that case she might come after me."

Esmeralda came in. She was magnificent. She had on an olive tailor-made traveling suit that had Fifth Avenue stamped in every fine line of it.

"What a happy reunion!" she gurgled. "We're going home, Mr. Austin. Did Dick tell you?"

John smiled and nodded. "Yes, Doctor Brawley told me. And, by the way, I'm going, too."

"How lovely! Oh, how perfectly lovely!"

John caught the resigned irony in Brawley's eyes. "I don't know," he said, "that I'm so entirely happy over it, Mrs. Brawley."

She was unabashed. "That's only because it's your first time over. You'll come again, of course. We always do and I love it. Though, as I always tell Dick, 'Dick dear,' I say, 'I don't altogether share your hankering!' Not that I don't adore

Europe myself. Who wouldn't? But I do love to get back to my own home and to my own friends and to the boys, of course."

Brawley arose heavily. He seemed to pull himself up out of his chair as if that act were a symbol of pulling himself away from his own plans and ideals and tastes and prejudices and definitely resigning himself to Esmeralda's management of their common lives. He groaned. He walked over to where Esmeralda was sitting and put a hand on her shoulder.

"The boys, that's it."

Esmeralda looked up at her husband with a smile that was genuinely tender.

"Dick's such a wonderful father, Mr. Austin. I know what he'd really like to do. He'd like not to bother about getting on in the world and write great big hard books. But he thinks of the boys ——"

Brawley withdrew his hand and looked severe. "Hold on, Esmeralda. If we are going to talk about it, let's stick to the facts. If I could write those books and my sons, because I was writing them, had to work their way through college by the toil of their hands—ah, in that case the boys

would have a real heritage. Well, it was not to be. I'll be the next dean of the graduate school and Mark and Jonathan will go to Princeton. Good. It's settled. I'm through struggling. But let's have no false chatter about it."

Esmeralda got up. She was wavering between weeping and smiling. Wryly she decided on the latter. "You know, Mr. Austin, they say a woman always has the last word. Well, it isn't so in our family."

John and Brawley both laughed. Esmeralda drew on her gloves.

"I will say this, though, Mr. Austin. Dick will enjoy being dean just the same."

"Good God!" cried Brawley. "Who said I wouldn't? But that's the most loathsome part of it—the most corrupting part. By the same token, my boy, go home and write *Saturday Evening Post* stories and try *not* to enjoy the money. Ha, Esmeralda, it isn't as simple as you fancy!"

"Well, I may be simple, Dick, but it relieves my conscience to hear that you'll enjoy it. You never would admit that before, you know."

They all stood in the doorway. Brawley turned once more.

"We haven't shed much light on your problem, have we, Austin?"

"You have," John said, "floods of it. I can't formulate my solution yet. I've just recently seen a gleam of light. But we'll meet in Columbus within a few weeks, and then, maybe, I'll be able to tell you more."

Brawley and John shook hands. Esmeralda declared that she felt like hugging him, that she'd call up his mother the minute she got home, that they would have the loveliest parties together, and wasn't it so true—her voice came floating from down the hall—that there was nothing like meeting abroad to cement friendship?

John closed his door and proceeded to pack. Suddenly he stopped. The finality and meaning of his action overcame him. He had given up Esther in his heart and mind. He knew now that a residuum remained—not of hope, not of any feeling that could be easily defined. But at the core of him there was evidently a monition that, so long as he was in Europe, he might see her again, know the touch of her hand, the sound of her voice. But it was precisely Europe that he must give up and with it all hope of her if he were ever to send her—as they had agreed he should—

any sign of such creative activity as might ultimately unite them in a common home of the spirit. He roused himself from his brooding inactivity and proceeded to put a neat layer of books at the bottom of his trunk.

VIII

AUTUMN burned in the trees of the campus. The poplars in the yard were beginning to look stripped. Damp yellow leaves lay on the Columbus streets. John Austin took long walks in his native city. He loved especially to walk down West Broad Street where the small houses of the poor begin. Small, box-like frame houses with small piazzas. Stout, loose-girdled women sweeping the leaves from the stoop; children at play in the street. These flat streets with their wooden houses were ugly. John knew that. But he did not feel the streets as ugly. He felt them as having a quality that lay on the hither or on the other side of all ordinary notions of beauty or ugliness. He didn't try to formulate his feeling; he didn't try at this time to formulate any of his feelings. He let the assurance of instinct suffice.

He stood in front of one of the small houses that was painted a sickly brown. A youngish man was sitting on the piazza smoking a cigarette. The man was shabby but neat; he was sitting hunched

up in an old rocking-chair. Every now and then an old work-worn woman would appear in the door of the house that gave on the piazza and steal a glance at the back of the man who was evidently her son. And that hunched back would feel the look of those sorrowful, anxious eyes and droop a little more, and the man would cough a retching, forced, artificial cough. His face was a curious face—not evil at all. It was a scared face trying not to look scared. It belonged to a scared soul. The young man knew that if he took a job he'd pilfer, that whatever work he undertook to do he would slack on it. He wanted to tell the truth, but he always lied in spite of himself, just drifted inevitably into lying and into feeble boasting. He knew he was no good. He was scared of the consequences. So he malingered and cultivated a cough. Often he didn't know, himself, whether he had a cough or not. Sometimes he was scared of the cough he feigned and dreaded going into consumption. Anyhow, the cough protected him and his mother took care of him and bought him cigarettes and he didn't have to work and pilfer and lie.

John Austin stood in front of the brownish house and saw all that. He was not yet ready to

begin to write again. But he couldn't help formulating to himself a beginning of the story of that mother and that son. It would be in very simple prose. The prose, however, would have the simplicity not of slouchiness nor of singularity in violent simplification, but of severity. He would write a sketch, he thought, called "Mother and Son." He didn't know whether he had the talent. But he was profoundly convinced that the right man, the man with the touch of magic in his art, could make a sketch about that mother and that son in the simplest American-tinged English prose into a thing above all the blue and scarlet and golden Madonnas in all the galleries of Rome.

Since he had come home John had avoided most of the people he knew. It hurt his mother. But he couldn't help that. She was hurt and almost a little terrified, anyhow. But her front was brave and cheery and she had remembered her lesson and didn't pry. But coming home from that walk on which he had seen the mother and her son in the brownish house on West Broad Street, he found Mrs. Austin with a flicker in her gray eyes and a triumphant and justified eagerness in her whole manner.

"John dear!"

"Yes, mother."

"Hooker called up while you were gone."

"Isn't he always calling up?"

"Well, naturally, John. You haven't even dropped in to see him."

"What was the use?"

"I don't think I understand you, John."

They were in the dining room, the unchanged dining room of John's boyhood. The clock ticked as it had done all these years; the almost bare poplars showed the black tracery of their twigs outside the window against a patch of afterglow. Mrs. Austin, conscious of the hard silence between them, spoke her next words with an unwonted effort.

"Hooker said, dear, that you must decide now whether you want to come back. He can't hold open your position any longer."

"I never asked him to hold it open."

"True. But it was nice of him just the same."

John nodded. "It was. Well, I don't want it."

Mrs. Austin's little figure was one forward strain. Her opportunity had come. She could hold in no longer.

"What *do* you want, John? Your trip doesn't seem to have done you ——"

He held up his hand. "Yes, mother, my trip did do me good. It taught me what I mightn't have learned in years. But I can't tell you what that is."

"Why? Why?"

"Because I don't know how to put it. I haven't any exact words for it. And I have a feeling that if I tried to put it into words I'd violate something in the experience I've had."

Mrs. Austin's intelligence came to her rescue. She nodded her head several times in a quick, bird-like way. "Yes, John, yes. I can see that. Then, if you don't mind, tell me what you're going to do."

He sat down in his old position, his hands folded between his knees. How life, with all its changes, sometimes came full circle, he thought. But he really wanted now to tell his mother what he was going to do because that would make the immediate doing of it easier and because he wanted all the money that was his.

"I'm going to a small Ohio town. I think it will be Sandusky. I like the lake and I always remember it from the summer we spent on Kelly's Island. You remember the island, mother, with the grapes and wine cellars?"

"Yes, dear. You were eleven then."

"Well, I'm going to Sandusky."

"It's an awful hole, John."

"It's the kind of an American place I must be in. I'm going to live there and I'm going to work."

"At your writing?"

"Yes, and it may take a long time before I produce anything. In fact I may never. Maybe I haven't any talent."

"Nonsense, John, nonsense!"

"Well, anyhow, I know at last what I want to do, what I must do if I'm to do anything."

"Good, good!"

"And I'm far from sure that you'll like the stuff if I do get any done."

"I'll try to. But the big thing for any one of us is to satisfy one's own mind."

"Fine, mother! That's fine of you. And I'll take all my money."

"The interest is hardly enough for you to live on permanently."

"I'm going to live simply. But I don't care if I use up some of the capital."

"You don't?"

"No. People like ourselves are too careful about security in money and in manners and in every-

thing. I can go to work on a paper again if necessary. Don't worry about that."

She gazed at him. The gray eyes seemed to want to absorb him. The mother did not want to lose contact with her son's soul.

"You heard, I suppose, that Dick Brawley has been made dean of the graduate school?"

John smiled. His mother suspected some subtle understanding between Brawley and himself.

"Yes, I knew he would be."

"Have you seen him since you came back?"

"No. He's been busy. But he'll understand. Anyhow, mother, I'll be running home now and then."

She drooped a little in her relief. "Of course you will, John. You must."

They both stood up and looked at each other. John knew that at last she had surrendered, that henceforth she would be content to watch and not to guide, and a feeling of warm affection for her welled up within him. The birth cord had been cut; they could be united now.

He had already made his simple preparations: a couple of suit cases, a typewriter, a box of books. Two days after the talk with his mother he took a train to Sandusky.

It was a day train, a local, and John went into the smoker. He lit a pipe. There were only eight or ten men in the car. They also smoked pipes or chewed tobacco. They seemed all to be middle-aged men, shabby and unshaven for two or three days. John heard the talk of two men who sat behind him. He walked up and down the car in the course of the hours and heard other scraps of conversation. Once or twice he joined in with a remark. Whenever he did the men looked at him a little furtively and distrustfully. From all their words and attitudes there came to him a blending of strange humility and feeble rebelliousness. The men reminded him of Earnhart, of what he thought poor Earnhart was likely to become. He had a sense of adventure such as he had not had on the road from Florence to Rome.

One man with a whitish face and a grizzled mustache and the scar of a gash in his forehead that had been but recently sewn up and was still healing, was more communicative than the others. He seemed, in fact, to want to talk to John. To him John was, day coach or not, a member of the master class and the man wanted to let the master class know what he thought. It did him good to speak his mind.

"Naw, Cap, there ain't as much work in this here country as you think. Wages is high yuh say? Sure. On paper. But what c'n a man buy for a dollar these days? That ain't all. Listen to me. They speed yuh up like hell. Yuh try to protect yourself. Hell! Listen t'what they do. I was workin' down in Dayton. Never mind the plant. We was all in the union an' the bosses pretended for a while not to notice. Then a man come along to work there—had his union papers an' everything—an' talked to us and said we was driven like niggers an' that was true, by God! an' that in other plants they had sanitary conditions an' we ought to have a eight-per-cent raise. Jesus! we knowed all that. But this here guy was the leader we was lookin' for. All right. We got ready for a walk-out. An' then this son of a b—— faded away an' the bosses came down on us an' got a injunction about conspiracy or some such God-damned thing and they called out the police an' here"—he pointed to his forehead—"here's what I got. That guy was a lousy spy, a whatchuh call it? They got some furrin name for it?"

"*Agent provocateur.*"

"That's it. I knowed you'd know. Hell!" He spat out his tobacco juice. He walked off down the

car. His back was straighter, his head erecter. He had said his say.

John glowed strangely within. He drew out a pencil and a little notebook and settled in his corner by the window. Life and work had begun for him.

He did not mind the haphazard desolateness of Sandusky. He knew that he could walk to the lake, to woods beside the lake that still had an aroma of the primitive. He did not mind the boarding house of Mrs. Derflinger. Mrs. Earnhart had told him about it long ago. Kate Derflinger was a cousin of hers. "Yes, sir, a first cousin. An' when that girl was young she had everything heart could wish for." Perhaps. To-day Kate Derflinger was a tall, thin slatternly-looking woman. She stood in her parlor, that had a "set" in golden oak, and, while she was talking to John, wiped the dust from a table surreptitiously with a corner of her apron. She had a room for him. Business wasn't so good. No, she used to have fine gentlemen who were good pay from the brewery. That was all over. The brewery was deserted. Not even turned into an ice plant. But she still aimed to have a nice house and she was sure John would enjoy his meals.

He found his room to be large and light. A couple of so-called rag rugs. A white-enamelled iron bed. A yellow bureau and chiffonier. A large table. Three chairs. The walls were tinted an unhealthy plum color. He sat down and lit a pipe and waited for the slow dusk to fall and melt into the room. How ugly it was and how natural it seemed to him in its ugliness. Did his eyes and heart need purging from the splendor of the paintings and the statues and the palaces that he had seen? Perhaps. Or perhaps it was only this—that if beauty was to be in America, it was a beauty that must be born here, upon this soil, from the souls of this people. How could he have dreamed of writing out of the great and weary heart of Rome? It was not his. All this was his—these men in the smoker, this ugly house in an ugly street, this bureau, this bed, these chairs. Also, thank God! the patch of sky that, now turning red and orange with a faint edge of green, he could see outside of his west window and a tree, sharply black against it, whose winter boughs tapped against the outer wall.

After a while he switched on the electric light and unpacked a few things. He had a feeling of peace and permanence that he had never had in his

mother's house. He washed up in the near-by bathroom and soon heard the supper bell.

The light of the long dining room blinded him for a moment. Mrs. Derflinger was there, neat in a haphazard way now, doing the honors, introducing her new boarder. "Meet Mr. Smith, teller at the Second National, Mr. Austin; Miss Gayley; Mr. O'Conner." There were two or three more whose names John didn't catch. His eyes were filled by a plump but graceful figure—girlish yet womanly. He saw a creamy skin, two black eyes, two thick black braids, the thickest, heaviest he had ever seen, a round, dimpled chin, a red mouth, a blush. "That's my niece, Louise," he heard Mrs. Derflinger say and felt a small, strong, soft hand steal into his own.

Louise sat next to him. She was shy and yet communicative. She had finished high school last June. She thought she might take nurse's training. Her sister was a nurse. She had to do something. She lived with her grandmother. Her mother was dead. Her father—she blushed—was away and not in very good health. Poor dad! But she had no particular taste for any line of work. She just loved reading. And she didn't mind housework, no, not a bit. That's the reason she

was here. She came over most every day to help Aunt Kate, who was often poorly. John saw the glint of light on her white, moist, beautiful teeth. He thought he understood. She had no particular aptitudes. She just wanted, half consciously, half unconsciously, to fulfill herself as a woman—through man and child and house. He felt her blooming toward him. He felt peace flood his soul. When supper was over they went out into the hall together and stood there a moment, and then, without words of explanation, went out for a walk into the autumnal night. John took her arm in the common American folk way which Louise understood, and her hand nestled into his.

IX

IT WAS after eleven o'clock when John Austin reached his room in Mrs. Derflinger's boarding house. He had taken Louise home to the little house in which she lived with her grandmother and they had stood for a while longer beside the broken wooden gate of the little front garden and had watched whitish ragged clouds scud past the moon. In the changing light she had lifted her face a little with a tentative but unmistakable gesture and he had kissed her soft young lips. And it was understood between them, though this understanding had not been put into words, that tomorrow night after supper they would slip out into the silent thrilling darkness again.

John sat in his room in the moonlight, smoking. He had drawn his rocking-chair to the window and looked out. He knew he could not sleep yet. But it was not a restless excitement that kept him awake; it was the deep satisfaction of a man who had found his way and who did not want to give up his awareness to sleep.

He knew exactly what he was going to do. He knew it with a profound and elemental recognition. He would marry Louise. She filled him with no romantic yearnings and no exotic dreams. She never would. But he wanted her. It was she whom, unknowing, he had wanted all along. He wanted her the way a man wants bread; the way a man wants water. She was a woman of his people whom he would take to wife. He wanted her to lie beside and to sit with before a fire and to eat with at one table and to be close and cozy with in a bright room on winter nights of snow and storm and sleet.

He would build her a house in Sandusky. That was more than she was expecting of the man who would some day soon be her man. He would build her a house of the kind that she liked and admired, a modern two-story frame house with hardwood floors and a tiled bathroom. There would be a vestibule downstairs and a parlor and a dining room and a pantry and a neat kitchen with all conveniences—an electric toaster and an electric percolator and one of those white, cunning kitchen cabinets. Upstairs there would be a big bedroom for them with one big bed, and a study for him and a spare bedroom. They would call it a spare bed-

room out of politeness. In a few months they would begin to plan furnishings for the nursery.

He would let her select the things for the house. He knew what she would select. She was a little beyond golden oak. She thought that was common. The bedroom would be in bird's-eye maple, the dining room in dark oak. He wasn't sure whether she would select a "set" for the parlor or not. If she did, she should have it. There would be Axminster rugs. She would let him pick out the pictures. He would pick out very few. Some severe landscapes. He thought he might possibly have a good photograph of the Forum over the desk in his study as a reminder, as a memento, as a warning.

He would let her do about the house as she liked in every respect. It would be a thoroughly comfortable house. It would be, in the eye of an æsthete and in the eye even of his mother's more or less "arty" friends, a thoroughly ugly house. But it would be a natural house, a house that corresponded to the country and the time and the civilization to which it belonged.

In this house he would live with Louise. She, at least, would be lovely to look upon. And she would be well groomed and well dressed and sweet

and dainty and charming in everything that pertained to her person. And this was a most significant fact. The American woman of the middle classes, even of the lower middle classes, who knew nothing of art, whose taste in furniture and pictures and hangings was atrocious—this same woman had developed an instinct for dress. Small-town girls on the campuses of provincial colleges had frocks with good lines; they had shoes and gloves and hats that were right. They knew how to wear their things; they achieved instinctively in this matter an equality with the women of Paris and of Vienna. Here was a set of æsthetic appreciations that had developed naturally, that were or had become indigenous, that formed an inevitable part now of this American world. Yes, Louise would be lovely always.

He would live, then, in this ugly comfortable house with his fresh and pretty and dainty wife, and he would beget children. He would be earth-rooted. He would be united to his kind. He would join the family of his country and of mankind. When his children were grown up there might have arisen a beauty from this soil and landscape and air, from these instincts and folk ways. Hence his children might live in more

beautiful houses surrounded by more beautiful things. Those houses and those things would be home-born; they would no longer be exotic. John remembered a house he had once seen —the house of a rich woman in New York, a woman who had made a great fortune with her stories and film scenarios. The house was lofty; it was majestic. It was filled with objects of art. Wherever you turned there was a gorgeous missal or a glowing Italian primitive. The gold in the paintings was like a trumpet sound and the reds were like the moaning of 'cellos and the blues like the long wail of violins. It would drive him mad to live in a place like that. For art must have a relation to the soul. And what relation did missals and Madonnas have to him? God forbid! Rather an honest bureau in bird's-eye maple. At least it let you alone. At least it didn't blare and tease you with its alien promptings. Yes, perhaps his children would do better than that, would find something with which their souls could be at home even as an Italian's is with his Madonna. As for him, his heart warmed to the core at the thought of that ugly house in an ugly street in the town of Sandusky, which he would build for Louise and himself to live in and have their children in. And

their lives would, after all, not be barren of beauty, either. He would select a site that had a view of the lake, and you don't miss much so long as there are trees and stars.

He pictured to himself the life in that house in Sandusky. Louise would be downstairs in the forenoon about her household tasks. She would have on a neat dress of gingham or print, and over it the daintiest and most graceful of aprons. He would be upstairs in his study, which would hold nothing but a very large flat-top desk and book shelves filled with his shabby, useful books, and a chair or two. He would be writing. And at last he would be writing to some purpose. He hoped he would write well—write in a simple, well-articulated prose, quite unpretentious, but, he trusted, not uneloquent on that account. And the story he would write—it would, he suspected, be quite a long novel—would be the story of the Earnharts as he had partly witnessed it and partly imagined it—the story of the rise and downfall, a humble rise and a humble fall enough, of an American family of the lower middle class through the false ambition of the wife and mother to ape a world that was not hers, that was not even the world of those who seemed to own it and revel

in it, a world of imported social forms and ambitions—itself an aped world and so hollow and foolish and useless from the start. A world of class distinctions and of a social game that was rooted in the soil of England, but that had no naturalness and no pertinence here. But he had no intention of pointing the moral of his tale. He would tell that tale with sufficient breadth, with all the exactness possible, and let the implications take care of themselves. He thought that they would, since they were so very clear in his own mind. It was the false notions and false ambitions and false refinements of his own class that were responsible for the ruin of the Earnharts as they were responsible for the ruin of the spiritual life of Dick Brawley. Ma Earnhart wanting her daughter to play the piano and Esmeralda Brawley wanting her boys to go to Princeton instead of attending the state university, and rich Americans buying Italian paintings which had no relation to their souls—were not all these sorry people under the sway of the same delusion? Under this delusion in its more rarefied form he had been brought up; under it he had gone to Rome; under it he had dreamed that he could draw strength and inspiration out of that world. Here

was his world, place, inspiration. Here in Sandusky, the husband of Louise Derflinger, sitting upstairs in his study, writing the story of the Earnharts.

He got up. He stood by the window. He faced the sky. He was not, by the way, exchanging one delusion for another. This might not be the end of his quest. Everywhere life is a quest. He might not end his days in the house in Sandusky. He might not even, God help him, end his days as the husband of Louise. He could not tell. This was his hour of vision. He would soon sink into the sweetness of his woman and his work. This was an hour to forget and then perhaps to remember—to remember in later years when this life that he planned now with all his heart, would no longer suffice, when the end of his quest would lie farther off and otherwhere. You could not tell. Strange and devious were the ways of mortals. There might be less content in the life he was planning than he dreamed. There might be more pain. And that pain might grow as the years went on until it was too great to bear. That didn't matter, either. That had to be accepted. That was, in the highest sense, a normal risk. The pain would be his pain, his and Louise's, a pain that

belonged to them and developed naturally out of the course of their existence and the development of their country's psychical life. It would not be something monstrous and strange and haunting and irreconcilable with the soul itself, as that pain would have been—how clear that was to him now—that would have come and broken them both if Esther Azancot had listened to his foolish pleading.

The moon was gone and darkness filled his room. He turned from the window and switched on the electric light and began to undress. Perhaps they would be lucky, he and Louise, and escape tragic difficulties and be contented to the end of their days. He didn't think he would be so successful that her head would be turned and she, like so many of her kind, take to foolish social notions and foolish "arty" ways. He hadn't a great deal of money. About a third of it would go into the house. Then they'd have to live more or less on his little capital until he made good with his books. And his books wouldn't be flashy books, but honest-to-God, rather gray realistic stories about simple American life. Still, stuff like that went a good deal better now than it did only a few years ago. More and more American men and

women were evidently getting to have a little sense and a little more interest in the country and the life and the natural art that were their own. Well, even if his books sold reasonably well, he and Louise wouldn't be troubled by too much money. And the children would come. He would have them go to public schools and to the state university. Still, children needed care and cost money. No, he thought the danger of flashiness and pretentiousness in their lives was small enough. And he felt, with an instinct which he knew to be the one unerring and utterly sure instinct of his life, that Louise had a deep womanliness and sanity that so-called culture and so-called refinement cannot supply, which in truth these much-vaunted things often warp and destroy.

He got into bed. He stretched his limbs luxuriously between the cool, fresh sheets. How beautiful a thing it was to be near home after long wandering, after wandering nearly all one's life! A few months would yet have to pass. But only a very few. Then, perhaps at the first touch of another spring-time, the house that he was planning would be built and he would take Louise into his arms and his barrenness and tenseness would be healed, and the falseness of his life gone from

him forever. He slipped off into sleep with a final vision of that house with Louise downstairs and himself working in his study and interrupting his work for a minute to run down into the dining room or kitchen to refresh his soul and mind with the sight of her face and the touch of her hand or of her soft young lips against his own.

THE END

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